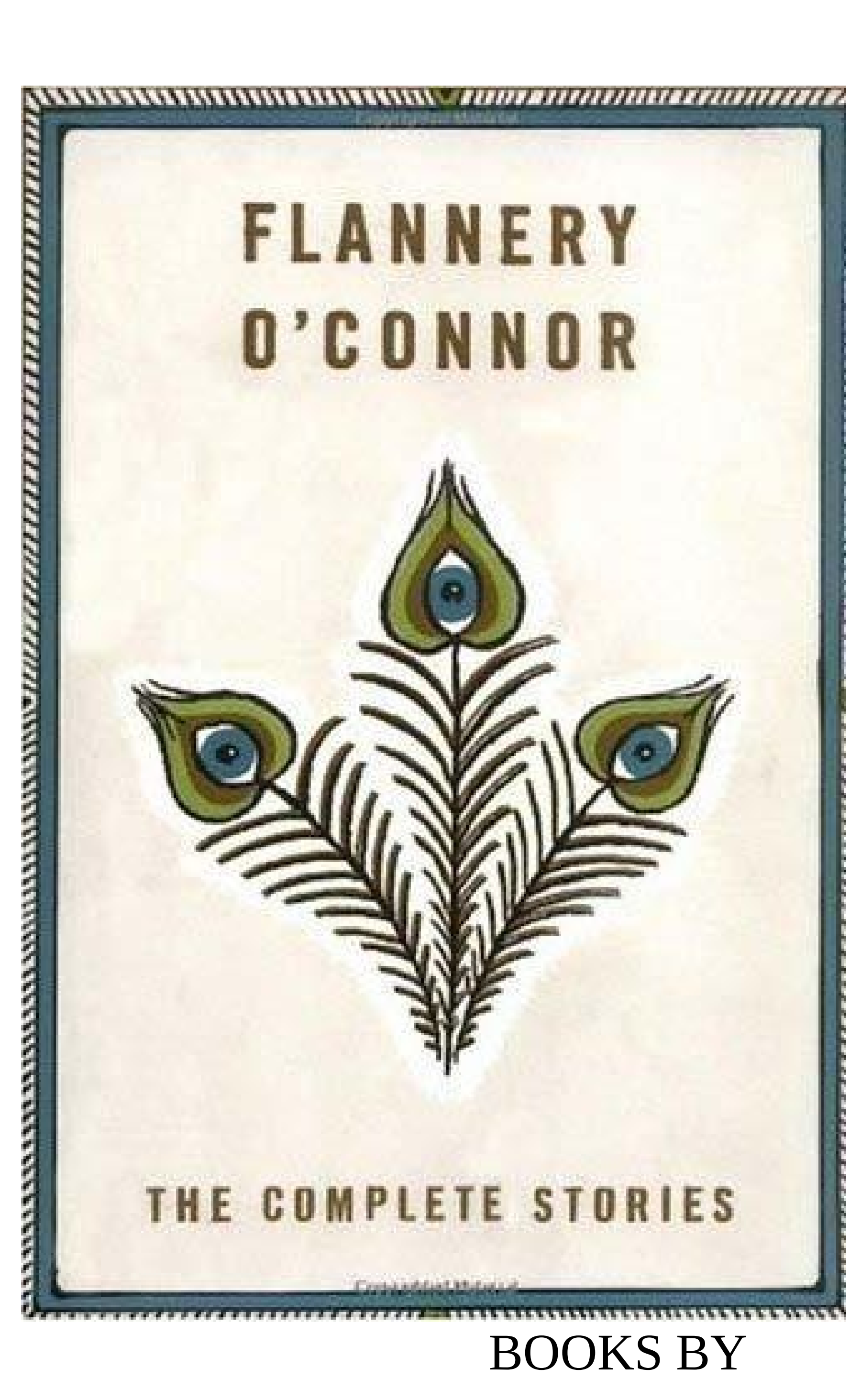
FLANNERY O'CONNOR



THE COMPLETE STORIES



BOOKS BY

Flannery O'Connor

NOVELS

Wise Blood The Violent Bear It Away

STORIES

A Good Man Is Hard to Find Everything That Rises Must Converge

with an introduction by Robert Fitzgerald

NON-FICTION

Mystery and Manners

edited and with an introduction by Robert and Sally Fitzgerald

The Habit of Being

edited and -with an introduction by Sally Fitzgerald

Flannery O'Connor

THE COMPLETE STORIES

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Introduction

Flannery O'Connor's first book has never, up to now, been published. It was entitled *The Geranium: A Collection of Short Stories* and consists of the first six stories in this volume. The title page of the original manuscript, in the library of the University of Iowa, bears the legend, "A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts, in the Department of English, in the Graduate College of the State University of Iowa." It is dated June 1947 and a separate page carries a dedication to her teacher, Paul Engle.

At their first meeting in his office, in 1946, Mr. Engle recalls,* he was unable to understand a word of Flannery's native Georgian tongue: "Embarrassed, I asked her to write down what she had just said on a pad. She wrote: 'My name is Flannery O'Connor. I am not a journalist. Can I come to the Writer's Workshop?' .. . I told her to bring examples of her writing and we would consider her, late as it was. Like Keats, who spoke Cockney but wrote the purest sounds in English, Flannery spoke a dialect beyond instant comprehension but on the page her prose was imaginative, tough, alive: just like Flannery herself. For a few weeks we had this strange and yet trusting relationship. Soon I understood those Georgia pronunciations. The stories were quietly filled with insight, shrewd about human weakness, hard and compassionate . . . She was shy about having them read, and when it was her turn to have a story presented in the Workshop, I would read it aloud anonymously. Robert Penn Warren was teaching a semester while Flannery was at the University of Iowa; there was a scene about a black and a white man, and Warren criticized it .. . It was changed. Flannery

* Letter to Robert Giroux dated July 13, 1971.

always had a flexible and objective view of her own writing, constantly revising, and in every case improving. The will to be a writer was adamant; nothing could resist it, not even her own sensibility about her own work. Cut, alter, try it again . . . Sitting at the back of the room, silent, Flannery was more of a presence than the exuberant talkers who serenade every writing-class widi their loudness. The only communicating gesture she would make was an occasional amused and shy smile at something absurd. The dreary chair she sat in glowed."

The publishing career of this unknown writer of twenty-one had already started. Flannery mailed "The Geranium" to the editors of *Accent* as early as February 1946.* They accepted it at once and printed it in tJieir summer issue. On the basis of the stories she later incorporated into her novel-in-progress, *Wise*

Blood, Mr. Engle recommended her for a prize offered by a publisher for a first novel. In the spring of 1947 she was awarded this prize—the sum of $750, which was to serve as part of the advance against royalties if the publisher ultimately accepted the novel.

Flannery received her master's degree that summer; *Sewanee Review* published "The Train" the next spring; in June 1948 she took die important and crucial step of finding a literary agent and a lifelong friend, Elizabeth McKee. Miss McKee placed her story "The Capture" (entitled "The Turkey" in the thesis) with *Mademoiselle* in November. It was shortly after this—I was not die publisher involved with the prize—that I met Flannery O'Connor.

Robert Lowell brought her into my office late in February 1949. They had come to New York from Yaddo, the writer's colony at Saratoga Springs, where Flannery worked on *Wise Blood* and Lowell on his poems. Behind her soft-spoken speech, clear-eyed gaze and shy manner, I sensed a tremendous strength. This was die rarest kind of young writer, one who was prepared to work her utmost and knew exactly what she must do with her talent. I rather regretted, as a publisher, meeting such an interesting writer at die start of a career in which I could play no part. She told me she was committed elsewhere, and if I knew anything it was that she would

* We are indebted to Daniel Curley, former editor of *Accent,* for verifying this date.

honor her commitment. She asked about a new writer I had recently published—Thomas Merton; I gave her a copy of *The Seven Storey Mountain* to take with her to her mother's house in Milledgeville, Georgia. Later I heard that she would be coming north again to live in Connecticut with my friends Sally and Robert Fitzgerald and I hoped I'd have the opportunity to know her better.

It was not until after her death in 1964 that I learned exactly how her publishing fate took an unexpected turn. (Our later publishing relationship also developed surprisingly, and I'll come to diat.) The details are fully and rather comically recorded in her correspondence with Elizabeth McKee, who gave me copies of the letters before she added the originals to the papers that Flannery's mother, Regina O'Connor, is collecting. The excerpts from Flannery's letters are quoted here with the permission of her literary executor, Robert Fitzgerald.

In her first letter (June 19, 1948) to Miss McKee, Flannery revealed she had been working on die novel "a year and a half and will probably be two more years finishing it." She described her writing habits in a letter dated July 13: "I must tell you how I work. I don't have my novel outlined and I have to write to discover what I am doing. Like tiie old lady, I don't know so well what I think until I see what I say; then I have to say it over again. I am working on the twelfth chapter now. I long ago quit numbering the pages but I suppose I am past

die 50,000 word mark. Of the twelve chapters only a few won't have to be rewritten, and I can't exhibit such formless stuff. It would discourage me to look at it right now and anyway I yearn to go about my business to die end."

At die end of the year, when she was worried about money, her agent advised her to submit die new chapters in order to get a definite commitment and perhaps a furdier advance. From Yaddo, December 15, 1948: "Perhaps I shall get down [to New York] in January and perhaps before diat send you the chapters I am working on .. . I have decided, however, diat no good comes of sending anydiing off in a hurry." On January 20, 1949, Flannery wrote: "Here are die first nine chapters which please show [the publisher] and let us be on with financial thoughts. They are, of course, not finished but diey are finished enough for the present . . ." When there was no response by February 5: "I'll be anxious to hear the outcome . . ."

She heard it on February 16 and it was not to her liking. One can sympathize with the publisher's problem at this early stage of composition. *Wise Blood* was a strange book, as Flannery would have been the first to acknowledge. What she could not accept was the tone of the publisher's letter. He said he thought she was a pretty straight shooter, that she had an astonishing gift, but that some aspects of the book were obscured by her habit of rewriting over and over again. To be honest, he added, he sensed a kind of aloneness in the book, as if she were writing out of her own experience, and consciously limiting this experience. He wished she would sit down and tell him what was what. He hoped she didn't mind his forthright letter.

Flannery wrote at once to Miss McKee: "Please tell me what is behind this Sears-Roebuck Straight Shooter approach. I presume . . . either that [the publisher] will not take the novel as it will be if left to my fiendish care (it will be essentially as it is), or that [the publisher] would like to rescue it at this point and train it into a conventional novel . . . The letter is addressed to a slightly dim-witted Campfire Girl, and I cannot look forward with composure to a lifetime of others like them."

At the same time, in an effort to honor her commitment, she answered the publisher's letter next day: "I can only hope that in the finished novel the direction will be clearer .. . I feel that whatever virtues the novel may have are very much connected with the limitations you mention. I am not writing a conventional novel, and I think that the quality of the novel I write will derive precisely from the peculiarity or aloneness, if you will, of the experience I write from .. . In short, I am amenable to criticism but only within the sphere of what I am trying to do; I will not pretend to do otherwise. The finished book, though I hope less angular, will be just as odd if not odder than the nine chapters you now

have."

Matters had not improved much by the following April, when she wrote Paul Engle to tell him that "other publishers who have read the two printed chapters"—she was referring to "The Train" and to the publication that winter of "The Heart of the Park" in *Partisan Review*—"are interested." She also told him about her meeting with the dissatisfied publisher, at which he "and I came to the conclusion that I was 'prematurely arrogant.' I supplied him with the phrase." She thought that "no one will understand my need to work this novel out in my own way better than you, although you may feel that I should work faster. I work ALL the time, but I cannot work fast. No one can convince me I shouldn't rewrite as much as I do." She concluded with the news that she had been turned down for the Guggenheim fellowship for which Mr. Engle had recommended her. (Her other sponsors were Robert Lowell, Philip Rahv and Robert Penn Warren.)

I met her again in May 1950, at die christening of Maria Juliana Fitzgerald in Ridgefield, Connecticut. I noted what good spirits Flannery was in, as we gravely performed our roles as godparents, renouncing die devil and all his works and pomps. (It is to be regretted diat she did not live to see our godchild become Sister Mary Julian in 1970.) She told me she was still working hard on the novel and was still committed to her publisher, though her literary agent soon informed me that the submission of additional chapters had not allayed his doubts. Finally, in October, after she had obtained a release from him, I offered and she signed a contract for *Wise Blood.*

The strength I sensed in Flannery at our first meeting now had an incredible strain put on it. She was stricken with lupus on her journey home for Christmas, and spent nine months, desperately ill, in and out of Emory Hospital in Atlanta. On her release she was unable to climb stairs, and Regina O'Connor then decided to move to "Andalusia," their country place five miles from town, which was to be their home and Flannery's refuge from dien on. By the following September Flannery was writing Miss McKee, "The last time I saw Bob Giroux, he said we would push die date [of delivery of die manuscript] up to die first of the year [1951] but that there was nodiing magic in that date. There is nothing magic in my speed or progress at this time, but I don't know any tiling for it. I plan to last until the first of the year and then see what I've got." A full year later (September 1, 1951) she wrote Miss McKee from Milledgeville: "Bob Giroux and Caroline Gordon made some suggestions for improving my book and I have been working on tJiese and have by now about come up widi anodier draft of it."

By the end of the year the novel was ready, and we began to prepare for

publication. Flannery had less vanity than anyone I have ever known. When I asked her for a photograph to use on die book jacket, I expected a picture taken before her illness. The new one she sent was not unattractive, and she looked out at the reader with that clear-eyed gaze of hers, but her hair had not fully grown back nor had die puffiness induced by cortisone wholly subsided. The photograph was widely reproduced when *Wise Blood* was published in May 1952. I was disappointed by die reviews more than she was; they all recognized her power but missed her point.

In the five years between 1947, when a draft of the first chapter of *Wise Blood* was written, and 1952, Flannery's development was amazing. In the diree years following, she wrote better and better. Starting late in 1952 with "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," a masterpiece of a story, she turned out one beauty after another, including "The River," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," "The Displaced Person," "The Artificial Nigger" and "Good Country People." Catherine Carver, whom we were fortunate enough to have as an editor, and who worked with Flannery at diis period, brought each new story into my office with more or less the same remark, "Wait till you read this one!" Early in 1955 Flannery completed work on her second book, a collection of these stories which she entitled *A Good Man Is Hard to Find.-ln* January we sent it to press, having set publication for June. I remember our amusement at Evelyn Waugh's reaction to the advance proofs we sent him: "If these stories are in fact die work of a young lady, they are indeed remarkable." At the beginning of April, before the book appeared, I resigned from the firm and joined the house with which I have since been associated. When Flannery sent me an inscribed copy, soon after my departure, I felt a twinge of sadness that my editorial association with her books had ended.

Once again fate rearranged what seemed to be an unalterable course. After the very successful publication of *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, Flannery was offered a new contract about which she asked my advice, saying she wanted to stay as long as Catherine Carver remained as her editor. In that case, I suggested, why not ask that such a stipulation be incorporated in the contract ? This was not readily granted, but Flannery had made up her mind and in die end she got what she wanted. Within three years, after Catherine Carver and Denver Lindley had left, it came to pass that Flannery was free to join the house she remained with until her death. We contracted for her third book, "a novel in progress," on April 15, 1958, and published *The Violent Bear It Away* in i960. Then I learned that

Wise Blood was out of print, and we soon acquired this classic work. She wrote a short and eloquent preface for the second edition, describing die book as "a comic novel about a Christian *malgri lui"* and stating that it had been written by "an author congenitally innocent of theory, but one widi certain preoccupations. That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence." She ended by defining her theme, free will or freedom, as "a mystery, and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen." We reissued *Wise Blood* in 1962, on die tendi anniversary of the original publication, and it lives on both in cloth and paperback editions. Didn't some wise man define a classic as a book that does not stay out of print?

One of Flannery's admirers was Thomas Merton, who became more of a fan with each new book of hers. Over the years 1 came to see how much die two had in common—a highly developed sense of comedy, deep faith, great intelligence. The aura of aloneness surrounding each of them was not an accident. It was their metier, in which they refined and deepened dieir very different talents in a short span of time. They both died at the height of their powers.

Finally, they were both as American as one can be. When publication of Merton's *The Sign of Jonas* was forbidden by the Abbot General in France, I was able to obtain its release only with die help of Jacques Maritain, who wrote him in beautiful French (the Abbot General did not read English and consequently had not read *The Sign of Jonas),* explaining what the "American Trappist" was up to. As for Flannery, whose work can only be understood in an American setting, when a German publisher wanted to drop some of her stories as too shocking for Germanic sensibilities, she wrote Miss McKee, "I didn't diink I was *that* vicious."

On a trip south in 1959 I stopped at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky to see Merton, before going to see Flannery in Georgia. He gave me a presentation copy of *the* beautifully designed private edition of *Prometheus: A Meditation* to take to her. He was much interested in Flannery's peacocks. From previous visits to "Andalusia" I was able to tell him about their habits—how they roost at dusk by gradual hops from ground to fence post to tree limb; how their trains get caught under car wheels because they refuse to hurry; how vain they are (they seemed to jockey for good angles when they saw my camera); how funny it is to see pcachicks rehearsing with their immature feadierduster tails; and how rare it is to see the ultimate display, when the peacock shimmers and shakes his feathers in a kind of ecstasy at the height of preening. I could not tell Merton enough about them or about Flannery and her surroundings. What was

Milledgeville like? Well, one of its sights was the beautiful ante-bellum Cline house, where Flannery's aunt served a formal midday dinner. He was surprised to learn diat far from being "backwoods" Milledgeville had once been the capital of Georgia. I also showed him a letter in which Flannery wrote: "Somebody sent me a gossip column that said Gene Kelly would make his TV debut in Flannery O'ConnorU 'backwoods love story'

[The Life You Save May Be Your Own. I certainly can't afford to miss this metamorphosis."

When I got to tiie O'Connors', Flannery was curious to hear about Gethsemani. Was Merton allowed to talk to me? Yes, without restriction. I described our walks in the woods and the monastic routine of the day: first office (Matins) at two ajn. and last office (Compline) at sunset, followed by bed. I mentioned that in Louis ville I'd bought Edith SitwelPs recording of *Facade*, which Merton played over and over, laughing so hard that tears ran down his cheeks, and Flannery asked me to recite some of the poems. Even my pallid approximation of Dame Edith's renderings of "Daisy and Lily, lazy and silly," "Long Steel Grass" (pronounced "Grawss"), "Black Mrs. Behemoth" and die rest made her face light up with smiles.

When Flannery died, Merton was not exaggerating his estimate of her wordi when he said he would not compare her with such good writers as Hemingway, Porter and Sartre but rather with "someone like Sophocles .. . I write her name widi honor, for all the truth and all the craft witii which she shows man's fall and his dishonor."

Up to die very end, she worked hard. She was working on *Everything That Rises Must Converge* during her final illness. "I have been thinking about diis collection of my stories and what can be done to get it out with me sick," she wrote Miss McKee on May 7, 1964. "I am definitely out of commission for the summer and maybe longer with this lupus. I have to stay mostly in bed .. . If I were well diere is a lot of rewriting and polishing I could do, but in my present state of health [the stories] are essentially all right the way they are." This is a typical O'Connor understatement; some of diese last stories, like "Revelation" and the title story, are as nearly perfect as stories can be. In die same letter she proposed eight stories for die book, one of which, "The Partridge Festival," she

later withdrew. All eight had appeared in magazines. Later in May she wrote, "I forgot to tell Bob Giroux tiiat the title *Everything That Rises Must Converge* is all right with me if he thinks that is what it ought to be." It seemed absolutely right and (though she never said so) may have dated from a few years earlier when I sent her a French andiology of the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, one section of which was entitled *Tout Ce Qui Monte Converge.* I was unaware of die two unpublished stories she was working on.

The first of diese new stories was "Parker's Back." Caroline Gordon later wrote of it: "Miss O'Connor's stories are all about the operations of supernatural grace in die lives of natural men and women. Such operations are infinitely various but so delicate that tiiey have eluded some of die subtlest writers. In . . . 'Parker's Back,' Miss O'Connor seems to have succeeded where the great Flaubert failed: in die dramatization of that particular heresy which denies Our Lord corporeal substance. We do not naturally like anything which is unfamiliar. No wonder Miss O'Connor's writings have baffled the reviewers, so much so they have reached for any *cliche* they could lay hold of in order to have some way of apprehending this original and disturbing work."

The final story, " Judgement Day," was mailed to me in early July. It is a revised and expanded version of "The Geranium," which appears to have been a favorite of hers, for letters to Miss McKee reveal that in 1955 she had also worked on an intermediate version under the title "An Exile in the East." As "Judgement Day" it became die nindi story in the collection published posthumously in 1965.

What turned out to be my last letter to Flannery was dated July 7, 1964. I knew of the recurrence of her illness, of course, but I did not know diat the lupus was now uncontrolled. I enclosed with my letter an advance proof of our catalogue description of *Everything That Rises Must Converge* as it was dien conceived. She never replied and in late July she was taken to the Baldwin County hospital at Milledgeville, where she died in a coma on August 3.

There are thirty-one stories in this volume. Nineteen are taken from Flannery's two collections and twelve* appear for die first time in book form. For this edition we have followed the author's original manuscripts for "The Partridge Festival," "Why Do die Heathen Rage?" and the first six stories. For the latter group we have also retained the order she followed in her diesis. The order of the other stories is chronological according to date of composition and does not duplicate the arrangement the author worked out for die two collections, which are of course available as she wanted them. Nor is it implied that all the stories here are of equal merit. It simply seems desirable to preserve as complete a

collection of Flannery O'Connor's short fiction as possible.

Elizabeth Bishop, who with her poet's eye sees more than most of us, wrote at the time of Flannery's death: "I am sure her few books will live on and on in American literature. They are narrow, possibly, but they are clear, hard, vivid, and full of bits of description, phrases, and an odd insight that contains more real poetry dian a dozen books of poems." She added a bit of testimony that Flannery herself would have relished: "Critics who accuse her of exaggeration are quite wrong, I think. I lived in Florida for several years next to a flourishing 'Church of God' (both white and black congregation), where every Wednesday night Sister Mary and her husband 'spoke in tongues.' After those Wednesday nights, nothing Flannery O'Connor ever wrote could seem at all exaggerated to me."

ROBERT GIROUX

• Sec *Notes*, p. 551.



THE COMPLETE STORIES OF

Flannery O'Connor

The Geranium

OLD DUDLEY folded into the chair he was gradually molding to his own shape and looked out the window fifteen feet away into another window framed by blackened red brick. He was waiting for die geranium. They put it out every morning about ten and they took it in at five-diirty. Mrs. Carson back home had a geranium in her window. There were plenty of geraniums at home, better-looking geraniums. Ours are sho nuff geraniums, Old Dudley thought, not any er diis pale pink business with green, paper bows. The geranium they would put in die window reminded him of the Grisby boy at home who had polio and had to be wheeled out every morning and left in the sun to blink. Lutisha could have taken that geranium and stuck it in the ground and had something worth looking at in a few weeks. Those people across the alley had no business with one. They set it out and let die hot sun bake it all day and diey put it so near the ledge the wind could almost knock it over. They had no business widi it, no business with it. It shouldn't have been there. Old Dudley felt his throat knotting up. Lutish could root anytiiing. Rabie too. His diroat was drawn taut. He laid his head back and tried to dear his mind. There wasn't much he could think of to think about that didn't do his throat that way.

His daughter came in. "Don't you want to go for a walk?" she asked. She looked provoked.

He didn't answer her.

"Well?"

"No." He wondered how long she was going to stand there. She made his eyes feel like his throat. They'd get watery and she'd see. She had seen before and had looked sorry for him. She'd looked sorry for herself too; but she could er saved herself, Old Dudley thought, if she'd just have let him alone—let him stay where he was back home and not be so taken up with her damn duty. She moved out of the room, leaving an audible sigh, to crawl over him and remind him again of that one minute—mat wasn't her fault at all—when suddenly he had wanted to go to New York to live with her.

He could have got out of going. He could have been stubborn and told her he'd spend his life where he'd always spent it, send him or not send him the money every month, he'd get along widi his pension and odd jobs. Keep her damn money—she needed it worse than he did. She would have been glad to have had her duty disposed of like that. Then she could have said if he died without his children near him, it was his own fault; if he got sick and there wasn't anybody

to take care of him, well, he'd asked for it, she could have said. But there was that thing inside him that had wanted to see New York. He had been to Atlanta once when he was a boy and he had seen New York in a picture show. *Big Town Rhythm* it was. Big towns were important places. The diing inside him had sneaked up on him for just one instant. The place like he'd seen in the picture show had room for him! It was an important place and it had room for him! He'd said yes, he'd go.

He must have been sick when he said it. He couldn't have been well and said it. He had been sick and she had been so taken up with her damn duty, she had wangled it out of him. Why did she have to come down mere in the first place to pester him? He had been doing all right. There was his pension that could feed him and odd jobs that kept him his room in the boarding house.

The window in that room showed him the river—thick and red as it struggled over rocks and around curves. He tried to think how it was besides red and slow. He added green blotches for trees on either side of it and a brown spot for trash somewhere upstream. He and Rabie had fished it in a flat-bottom boat every Wednesday. Rabie knew the river up and down for twenty miles. There wasn't another nigger in Coa County that knew it like he did. He loved the river, but it hadn't meant anything to Old Dudley. The fish were what he was after. He liked to come in at night with a long string of diem and slap diem down in the sink. "Few fish I got," he'd say. It took a man to get diose fish, die old girls at die boarding house always said. He and Rabie would start out early Wednesday morning and fish all day. Rabie would find die spots and row; Old Dudley always caught diem. Rabie didn't care much about catching them—he just loved die river. "Ain't no use settin' yo' line down dere, boss," he'd say. "Ain't no fish dere. Dis ol' riber ain't hidin' none nowhere 'round hyar, nawsuh." And he would giggle and shift the boat downstream. That was Rabie. He could steal cleaner than a weasel but he knew where the fish were. Old Dudley always gave him die little ones.

Old Dudley had lived upstairs in die corner room of the boarding house ever since his wife died in '22. He protected the old ladies. He was the man in the house and he did the things a man in the house was supposed to do. It was a dull occupation at night when die old girls crabbed and crocheted in the parlor and die man in die house had to listen and judge the sparrow-like wars that rasped and twittered intermittently. But in the daytime there was Rabie. Rabie and Lutisha lived down in the basement. Lutish cooked and Rabie took care of the cleaning and the vegetable garden; but he was sharp at sneaking off widi half his work done and going to help Old Dudley with some current project—building a

hen house or painting a door. He liked to listen, he liked to hear about Adanta when Old Dudley had been diere and about how guns were put togedier on the inside and all the other things the old man knew.

Sometimes at night they would go 'possum hunting. They never got a 'possum but Old Dudley liked to get away from the ladies once in a while and hunting was a good excuse. Rabie didn't like 'possum hunting. They never got a 'possum; they never even treed one; and besides, he was mostly a water nigger. "We ain't gonna go huntin' no 'possum tonight, is we, boss? I got a lil' business I wants tuh tend tuh," he'd say when Old Dudley would start talking about hounds and guns. "Whose chickens you gonna steal tonight?" Dudley would grin. "I reckon I be huntin' 'possum tonight," Rabie'd sigh.

Old Dudley would get out his gun and take it apart and, as Rabie cleaned the pieces, would explain the mechanism to him. Then he'd put it together again. Rabie always marveled at the way he could put it together again. Old Dudley would have liked to have explained New York to Rabie. If he could have showed it to Rabie, it wouldn't have been so big—he wouldn't have felt pressed down every time he went out in it. "It ain't so big," he would have said. "Don't let it get you down, Rabie. It's just like any other city and cities ain't all that complicated."

But they were. New York was swishing and jamming one minute and dirty and dead the next. His daughter didn't even live in a house. She lived in a building—the middle in a row of buildings all alike, all blackened-red and gray with rasp-mouthed people hanging out their windows looking at other windows and other people just like them looking back. Inside you could go up and you could go down and there were just halls that reminded you of tape measures strung out with a door every inch. He remembered he'd been dazed by the building the first week. He'd wake up expecting the halls to have changed in the night and he'd look out the door and there they stretched like dog runs. The streets were the same way. He wondered where he'd be if he walked to the end of one of them. One night he dreamed he did and ended at the end of the building—nowhere.

The next week he had become more conscious of the daughter and son-in-law and their boy—no place to be out of their way. The son-in-law was a queer one. He drove a truck and came in only on the weekends. He said "nah" for "no"-and he'd never heard of a 'possum. Old Dudley slept in the room with the boy, who was six teen and couldn't be talked to. But sometimes when the daughter and Old Dudley were alone in the apartment, she would sit down and talk to him. First she had to think of something to say. Usually it gave out before what she considered was the proper time to get

up and do something else, so he would have to say something. He always tried to think of something he hadn't said before. She never listened the second time. She was seeing that her father spent his last years with his own family and not in a decayed boarding house full of old women whose heads jiggled. She was doing her duty.

She had brothers and sisters who were not.

Once she took him shopping with her but he was too slow. They went in a "subway"—a railroad underneath the ground like a big cave. People boiled out of trains and up steps and over into the streets. They rolled off the street and down steps and into trains— black and white and yellow all mixed up like vegetables in soup. Everything was boiling. The trains swished in from tunnels, up canals, and all of a sudden stopped. The people coming out pushed through the people coming in and a noise rang and the train swooped off again. Old Dudley and the daughter had to go in three different ones before they got where they were going. He wondered why people ever went out of their houses. He felt like his tongue had slipped down in his stomach. She held him by the coat sleeve and pulled him through the people.

They went on an overhead train too. She called it an "El." They had to go up on a high platform to catch it. Old Dudley looked over the rail and could see the people rushing and the automobiles rushing under him. He felt sick. He put one hand on the rail and sank down on the wooden floor of the platform. The daughter screamed and pulled him over from the edge. "Do you want to fall off and kill yourself?" she shouted.

Through a crack in the boards he could see the cars swimming in the street. "I don't care," he murmured, "I don't care if I do or not."

"Come on," she said, "you'll feel better when we get home."

"Home?" he repeated. The cars moved in a rhythm below him.

"Come on," she said, "here it comes; we've just got time to make it." They'd just had time to make all of them.

They made that one. They came back to the building and the apartment. The apartment was too tight. There was no place to be where there wasn't somebody else. The kitchen opened into the bathroom and the bathroom opened into everything else and you were always where you started from. At home there was upstairs and the basement and the river and downtown in front of Fraziers . . . damn his throat.

The geranium was late today. It was ten-thirty. They usually had it out by ten-fifteen. Somewhere down the hall a woman shrilled something unintelligible out to the street; a radio was bleating the worn music to a soap serial; and a

garbage can crashed down a fire escape. The door to the next apartment slammed and a sharp footstep clipped down the hall. "That would be the nigger," Old Dudley muttered. "The nigger with the shiny shoes." He had been there a week when the nigger moved in. That Thursday he was looking out the door at the dog-run halls when this nigger went into the next apartment. He had on a gray, pin-stripe suit and a tan tie. His collar was stiff and white and made a clear-cut line next to his neck. His shoes were shiny tan—they matched his tie and his skin. Old Dudley scratched his head. He hadn't known the kind of people that would live thick in a building could afford servants. He chuckled. Lot of good a nigger in a Sunday suit would do them. Maybe this nigger would know die country around here—or maybe how to get to it. They might could hunt. They might could find them a stream somewhere. He shut the door and went to die daughter's room. "Hey!" he shouted, "the folks next door got 'em a nigger. Must be gonna clean for them. You reckon they gonna keep him every day?"

She looked up from making die bed. "What are you talking about?" "I say they got 'em a servant next door—a nigger—all dressed up in a Sunday suit."

She walked to the other side of the bed. "You must be crazy," she said. "The next apartment is vacant and besides, nobody around here can afford any servant."

"I tell you I saw him," Old Dudley snickered. "Going right in there witli a tie and a white collar on—and sharp-toed shoes." "If he went in diere, he's looking at it for himself," she muttered. She went to die dresser and started fidgeting with things.

Old Dudley laughed. She could be right funny when she wanted to. "Well," he said, "I think I'll go over and see what day he gets off. Maybe I can convince him he likes to fish," and he'd slapped his pocket to make the two quarters jingle. Before he got out in the hall good, she came tearing behind him and pulled him in. "Can't you hear?" she'd yelled. "I meant what I said. He's renting that himself if he went in there. Don't you go asking him any questions or saying anything to him. I don't want any trouble widi niggers."

"You mean," Old Dudley murmured, "he's gonna live next door to you?" She shrugged. "I suppose he is. And you tend to your own business," she added. "Don't have anything to do with him."

That's just die way she'd said it. Like he didn't have any sense at all. But he'd told her off then. He'd stated his say and she knew what he meant. "You ain't been raised that way!" he'd said thundery-like. "You ain't been raised to live tight

with niggers that think they're just as good as you, and you think I'd go messin' around with one er that kind! If you think I want anything to do with them, you're crazy." He had had to slow down then because his throat was tightening. She'd stood stiff up and said they lived where they could afford to live and made the best of it. Preaching to him! Then she'd walked stiff off without a word more. That was her. Trying to be holy with her shoulders curved around and her neck in the air. Like he was a fool. He knew Yankees let niggers in their front doors and let them set on their sofas but he didn't know his own daughter that was raised proper would stay next door to diem—and then think he didn't have no more sense than to want to mix with them. Him!

He got up and took a paper off another chair. He might as well appear to be reading when she came through again. No use having her standing up there staring at him, believing she had to think up something for him to do. He looked over the paper at the window across die alley. The geranium wasn't there yet. It had never been this late before. The first day he'd seen it, he had been sitting there looking out the window at the other window and he had looked at his watch to see how long it had been since breakfast. When he looked up, it was there. It startled him. He didn't like flowers, but the geranium didn't look like a flower. It looked like the sick Grisby boy at home and it was the color of die drapes the old ladies had in the parlor and the paper bow on it looked like the one behind Lutish's uniform she wore on Sundays. Lutish had a fondness for sashes. Most niggers did, Old Dudley thought.

The daughter came dirough again. He had meant to be looking at the paper when she came through. "Do me a favor, will you?" she asked as if she had just diought up a favor he could do.

He hoped she didn't want him to go to the grocery again. He got lost die time before. All the blooming buildings looked alike. He nodded.

"Go down to the third floor and ask Mrs. Schmitt to lend me the shirt pattern she uses for Jake."

Why couldn't she just let him sit? She didn't need the shirt pattern. "All right," he said. "What number is it?"

"Number io—just like this. Right below us diree floors down."

Old Dudley was always afraid that when he went out in die dog runs, a door would suddenly open and one of die snipe-nosed men that hung off the window ledges in his undershirt would growl, "What are you doing here?" The door to the nigger's apartment was open and he could see a woman sitting in a chair by die window. "Yankee niggers," he muttered. She had on rimless glasses and diere was a book in her lap. Niggers don't think tliey're dressed up till diey got on

glasses, Old Dudley thought. He remembered Lutish's glasses. She had saved up diirteen dollars to buy them. Then she went to the doctor and asked him to look at her eyes and tell her how thick to get the glasses. He made her look at animals' pictures through a mirror and he stuck a light dirough her eyes and looked in her head. Then he said she didn't need any glasses. She was so mad she burned die corn bread three days in a row, but she bought her some glasses anyway at die ten-cent store. They didn't cost her but $1.98 and she wore diem every Saddey. "That ^vas niggers," Old Dudley chuckled. He realized he had made a noise, and covered his moudi widi his hand. Somebody might hear him in one of die apartments.

He turned down die first flight of stairs. Down die second he heard footsteps coming up. He looked over die banisters and saw it was a woman—a fat woman with an apron on. From the top, she looked kind er like Mrs. Benson at home. He wondered if she would speak to him. When diey were four steps from each odier, he darted a glance at her but she wasn't looking at him. When diere were no steps between them, his eyes fluttered up for an instant and she was looking at him cold in die face. Then she was past him. She hadn't said a word. He felt heavy in his stomach.

He went down four flights instead of diree. Then he went back up one and found number 10. Mrs. Schmitt said O.K., wait a minute and she'd get the pattern. She sent one of the children back to the door with it. The child didn't say anything.

Old Dudley started back up die stairs. He had to take it more slowly. It tired him going up. Everything tired him, looked like. Not like having Rabie to do his running for him. Rabie was a light-footed nigger. He could sneak in a hen house 'diout even die hens knowing it and get him the fattest fryer in there and not a squawk. Fast too. Dudley had always been slow on his feet. It went that way widi fat people. He remembered one time him and Rabie was hunting quail over near Molton. They had 'em a hound dog diat could find a covey quickern any fancy pointer going. He wasn't no good at bringing diem back but he could find diem every time and dien set like a dead stump while you aimed at die birds. This one time die hound stopped cold-still. "Dat gonna be a big 'un," Rabie whispered, "I feels it." Old Dudley raised the gun slowly as they walked along. He had to be careful of the pine needles. They covered die ground and made it slick. Rabie shifted his weight from side to side, lifting and setting his feet on die waxen needles widi unconscious care. He looked straight ahead and moved forward swiftly. Old Dudley kept one eye ahead and one on die ground. It would

slope and he would be sliding forward dangerously, or in pulling himself up an incline, he would slide back down.

"Ain't I better get dem birds dis time, boss?" Rabie suggested. "You ain't never easy on yo' feets on Monday. If you falls in one dem slopes, you gonna scatter dem birds fo' you gits dat gun up."

Old Dudley wanted to get die covey. He could er knocked four out of it easy. "I'll get 'em," he muttered. He lifted the gun to his eye and leaned forward. Somediing slipped beneath him and he slid backward on his heels. The gun went off and die covey sprayed into die air.

"Dem was some mighty fine birds we let get away from us," Rabie sighed.

"We'll find anodier covey," Old Dudley said. "Now get me out of diis damn hole." He could er got five er diose birds if he hadn't fallen. He could er shot 'em off like cans on a fence. He drew one hand back to his

ear and extended die odier forward. He could er knocked 'em out like clay pigeons. Bang) A squeak on the staircase made him wheel around—his arms still holding the invisible gun. The nigger was clipping up die steps toward him, an amused smile stretching his trimmed mustache. Old Dudley's mouth dropped open. The nigger's lips were pulled down like he was trying to keep from laughing. Old Dudley couldn't move. He stared at die clear-cut line die nigger's collar made against his skin.

"What are you hunting, old-timer?" die Negro asked in a voice diat sounded like a nigger's laugh and a white man's sneer.

Old Dudley felt like a child widi a pop-pistol. His moudi was open and his tongue was rigid in die middle of it. Right below his knees felt hollow. His feet slipped and he slid three steps and landed sitting down.

"You better be careful," die Negro said. "You could easily hurt yourself on diese steps." And he held out his hand for Old Dudley to pull up on. It was a long narrow hand and die dps of die fingernails were clean and cut squarely. They looked like diey might have been filed. Old Dudley's hands hung between his knees. The nigger took him by the arm and pulled up. "Whew!" he gasped, "you're heavy. Give a little help here." Old Dudley's knees unbended and he staggered up. The nigger had him by die arm. "I'm going up anyway," he said. "I'll help you." Old Dudley looked frantically around. The steps behind him seemed to close up. He was walking widi die nigger up the stairs. The nigger was waiting for him on each step. "So you hunt?" die nigger was saying. "Well, let's see. I went deer hunting once. I believe we used a Dodson .38 to get diose deer. What do you use?"

Old Dudley was staring dirough die shiny tan shoes. "I use a gun," he

mumbled.

"I like to fool widi guns better dian hunting," die nigger was saying. "Never was much at killing anydiing. Seems kind of a shame to deplete the game reserve. I'd collect guns if I had die time and the money, diough." He was waiting on every step till Old Dudley got on it. He was explaining guns and makes. He had on gray socks widi a black fleck in diem. They finished die stairs. The nigger walked down die hall widi him, holding him by the arm. It probably looked like he had his arm locked in the nigger's. They went right up to Old Dudley's door. Then the nigger asked, "You from around here?"

Old Dudley shook his head, looking at die door. He hadn't looked at die nigger yet. All the way up the stairs, he hadn't looked at die nigger. "Well," the nigger said, "it's a swell place— once you get used to it." He patted Old Dudley on the back and went into his own apartment. Old Dudley went into his. The pain in his throat was all over his face now, leaking out his eyes.

He shuffled to die chair by die window and sank down in it. His diroat was going to pop. His throat was going to pop on account of a nigger—a damn nigger diat patted him on the back and called him "old-timer." Him that knew such as that couldn't be. Him diat had come from a good place. A good place. A place where such as that couldn't be. His eyes felt strange in their sodkets. They were swelling in diem and in a minute diere wouldn't be any room left for them there. He was trapped in this place where niggers could call you "old-timer." He wouldn't be trapped. He wouldn't be. He rolled his head on the back of the chair to stretch his neck that was too full.

A man was looking at him. A man was in the window across the alley looking straight at him. The man was watching him cry. That was where die geranium was supposed to be and it was a man in his undershirt, watching him cry, waiting to watch his throat pop. Old Dudley looked back at the man. It was supposed to be the geranium. The geranium belonged there, not the man. "Where is die geranium?" he called out of his tight throat.

"What you cryin' for?" the man asked. "I ain't never seen a man cry like diat."

"Where is the geranium?" Old Dudley quavered. "It ought to be diere. Not you."

"This is my window," the man said. "I got a right to set here if I want to."

"Where is it?" Old Dudley shrilled. There was just a little room left in his diroat.

"It fell off if it's any of your business," the man said.

Old Dudley got up and peered over the window ledge. Down in the alley, way six floors down, he could see a cracked flower pot scattered over a spray of dirt and something pink sticking out of a green paper bow. It was down six floors. Smashed down six floors.

Old Dudley looked at the man who was chewing gum and waiting to see the throat pop. "You shouldn't have put it so near the ledge," he murmured. "Why don't you pick it up?"

"Why don't you, pop?" Old Dudley stared at the man who was where the geranium should have been.

He would. He'd go down and pick it up. He'd put it in his own window and look at it all day if he wanted to. He turned from the window and left the room. He walked slowly down the dog run and got to the steps. The steps dropped down like a deep wound in *the* floor. They opened up through a gap like a cavern and went down and down. And he had gone up them a little behind the nigger. And the nigger had pulled him up on his feet and kept his arm in his and gone up the steps with him and said he hunted deer, "old-timer," and seen him holding a gun that wasn't there and sitting on the steps like a child. He had shiny tan shoes and he was trying not to laugh and tlie whole business was laughing. There'd probably be niggers with black flecks in their socks on every step, pulling down their mouths so as not to laugh. The steps dropped down and down. He wouldn't go down and have niggers pattin' him on the back. He went back to the room and the window and looked down at tlie geranium.

The man was sitting over where it should have been. "I ain't seen you pickin' it up," he said.

Old Dudley stared at the man.

"I seen you before," the man said. "I seen you settin' in that old chair every day, starin' out the window, looking in my apartment. What I do in my apartment is my business, see? I don't like people looking at what I do."

It was at the bottom of the alley with its roots in the air.

"I only tell people once," the man said and left the window.

The Barber

IT is trying on liberals in Dilton. After the Democratic White Primary, Rayber changed his barber. Three weeks before it, while he was shaving him, the barber asked, "Who you gonna vote for?" "Darmon," Rayber said. "You a nigger-lover?" Rayber started in the chair. He had not expected to be approached so brutally. "No," he said. If he had not been taken off-balance, he would have said, "I am neither a Negro- nor a white-lover." He had said that before to Jacobs, the philosophy man, and—to show you how trying it is for liberals in Dilton—Jacobs—a man of his education—had muttered, "That's a poor way to be." "Why?" Rayber had asked bluntly. He knew he could argue Jacobs down. Jacobs had said, "Skip it." He had a class. His classes frequently occurred, Rayber noticed, when Rayber was about to get him in an argument. "I am neither a Negro- nor a white-lover," Rayber would have said to the barber. The barber drew a clean path through the lather and then pointed the razor at Rayber. "I'm tellin' you," he said, "there ain't but two sides now, white and black. Anybody can see that from this campaign. You know what Hawk said? Said a hunnert and fifty years ago, they was runnin' each other down eatin' each other— thxowin' jewel rocks at birds—skinnin' horses with their teeth. A nigger come in a white barber shop in Atlanta and says, 'Gimme a haircut.' They dirowed him out but it just goes to show you. Why listen, three black hyenas over in Mulford last month shot a white man and took half of what was in his house and you know where

J5 they are now? Settin' in their county jail eatin' like the President of the United States—they might get dirty in the chain gang; or some damn nigger-lover might come by and be heart-broke to see 'em pickin' rock. Why, lemme tell you this—ain't nothin' gonna be good again until we get rid of them Mother Hubbards and get

us a man can put these niggers in their places. Shuh."

"You hear that, George?" he shouted to the colored boy wiping up die floor around die basins.

"Sho do," George said.

It was time for Rayber to say something but notiiing appropriate would come. He wanted to say something that George would understand. He was startled that George had been brought into the conversation. He remembered Jacobs telling about lecturing at a Negro college for a week. They couldn't say Negro—nigger — colored—black. Jacobs said he had come home every night and shouted, "NIGGER NIGGER NIGGER" out the back window. Rayber wondered what George's leanings were. He was a trim-looking boy.

"If a nigger come in my shop with any of tiiat haircut sass, he'd get it cut all right." The barber made a noise between his teeth. "You a Mother Hubbard?" he asked.

"I'm voting for Darmon, if diat's what you mean," Rayber said.

"You ever heard Hawkson talk?"

"I've had that pleasure," Rayber said.

"You heard his last one?"

"No, I understand his remarks don't alter from speech to speech," Rayber said curtly.

"Yeah?" die barber said. "Well, this last speech was a killeroo! GT Hawk let them Modier Hubbards have it."

"A good many people," Rayber said, "consider Hawkson a dema gogue." He wondered if George knew what demagogue meant. Should have said, "lying politician."

"Demagogue!" The barber slapped his knee and whooped. "That's what Hawk saidl" he howled. "Ain't that a shotl 'Folks,' he says, 'them Mother Hubbards says I'm a demagogue.' Then he rears back and says sort of soft-like, 'Am I a demagogue, you people?' And they yells, 'Naw, Hawk, you ain't no demagogue!' And he comes forward shouting, 'Oh yeah I am, I'm die best damn demagogue in this state!' And you should hear them people roar! Whew!"

"Quite a show," Rayber said, "but what is it but a. . . ."

"Mother Hubbard," the barber muttered. "You been taken in by 'em all right. Lemme tell you somethin'. . . ." He reviewed Hawk-son's Fourth of July speech. It had been another killeroo, ending with poetry. Who was Darmon? Hawk wanted to know. Yeah, who was Darmon? the crowd had roared. Why, didn't

they know? Why, he was Little Boy Blue, blowin' his horn. Yeah. Babies in the meadow and niggers in the corn. Man! Rayber should have heard that one. No Mother Hubbard could have stood up under it.

Rayber thought diat if the barber would read a few. . . .

Listen, he didn't have to read nothin.' All he had to do was think. That was the trouble with people these days—they didn't think, diey didn't use their horse sense. Why wasn't Rayber thinkin'? Where was his horse sense?

Why am I straining myself? Rayber thought irritably.

"Nossir!" the barber said. "Big words don't do nobody no good. They don't take the place of diinkin'." "Thinking!" Rayber shouted. "You call yourself thinking?"

"Listen," the barber said, "do you know what Hawk told them

people at Tilford?" At Tilford Hawk had told them that he liked niggers fine in their place and if they didn't stay in that place, he had a place to put 'em. How about that?

Rayber wanted to know what that had to do with thinking.

The barber thought it was plain as a pig on a sofa what that had to do witii dunking. He thought a good many other things too, which he told Rayber. He said Rayber should have heard the Hawk-son speeches at Mullin's Oak, Bedford, and Chickerville.

Rayber settled down in his chair again and reminded the barber that he had come in for a shave.

The barber started back shaving him. He said Rayber should have heard die one at Spartasville. "There wasn't a Mother Hubbard left standin', and all the Boy Blues got their horns broke. Hawk said," he said, "that the time had come when you had to sit on the lid widi. . . ."

"I have an appointment," Rayber said. "I'm in a hurry." Why should he stay and listen to that tripe?

As much rot as it was, the whole asinine conversation stuck with him the rest of the day and went through his mind in persistent detail after he was in bed that night. To his disgust, he found that he was going through it, putting in what he would have said if he'd had an opportunity to prepare himself. He wondered how Jacobs would have handled it. Jacobs had a way about him that made people think he knew more than Rayber thought he knew. It was not a bad trick in his profession. Rayber often amused himself analyzing it. Jacobs would have handled the barber calmly enough. Rayber started through the conversation again, thinking how Jacobs would have done it. He ended doing it himself.

The next time he went to the barber's, he had forgotten about the argument. The barber seemed to have forgotten it too. He disposed of the weatiier and

stopped talking. Rayber was wondering what was going to be for supper. Oh. It was Tuesday. On Tuesday his wife had canned meat. Took canned meat and baked it widi cheese—slice of meat and a slice of cheese—turned out striped—why do we have to have this stuff every Tuesday?—if you don't like it you don't have to—

"You still a Modier Hubbard?"

Rayber's head jerked. "What?"

"You still for Darmon?"

"Yes," Rayber said and his brain darced to its store of preparations.

"Well, look-a-here, you teachers, you know, looks like, well. . . ." He was confused. Rayber could see tiiat he was not so sure of himself as he'd been die last time. He probably diought he had a new point to stress. "Looks like you fellows would vote for Hawk on account of you know what he said about teachers' salaries. Seems like you would now. Why not? Don't you want more money?"

"More money I" Rayber laughed. "Don't you know that with a rotten governor I'd lose more money tiian he'd give me?" He realized that he was finally on the barber's level. "Why, he dislikes too many different kinds of people," he said. "He'd cost me twice as much as Darmon."

"So what if he would?" die barber said. "I ain't one to pinch money when it does some good. I'll pay for quality any day." "That's not what I meant!" Rayber began. "That's not. . . ." "That raise Hawk's promised don't apply to teachers like him anyway," somebody said from die back of die room. A fat man widi an air of executive assurance came over near Rayber. "He's a college teacher, ain't he?"

"Yeah," the barber said, "that's right. He wouldn't get Hawk's raise; but say, he wouldn't get one if Darmon was elected neither."

"Ahh, he'd get something. All die schools are supporting Darmon. They stand to get their cut—free textbooks or new desks or something. That's the rules of the game."

"Better schools," Rayber sputtered, "benefit everybody." "Seems like I been hearin' that a long time," the barber said. "You see," die man explained, "you can't put nothing over on the schools. That's the way they throw it off—benefits everybody." The barber laughed. "If you ever thought . . ." Rayber began. "Maybe tliere'd be a new desk at die head of die room for you," die man chortled. "How about that, Joe?" He nudged the barber. Rayber wanted to lift his foot under the man's chin. "You ever heard about reasoning?" he

muttered.

"Listen," die man said, "you can talk all you want. What you don't realize is, we've got an issue here. How'd you like a couple of black faces looking at you from the back of your classroom?"

Rayber had a blind moment when he felt as if somediing that wasn't there was bashing him to the ground. George came in and began washing basins. "Willing to teach any person willing to learn —black or white," Rayber said. He wondered if George had looked

UP"All right," the barber agreed, "but not mixed up together, huh? How'd you like to go to a white school, George?" he shouted. "Wouldn't like that," George said. "We needs sommo powders.

These here die las' in diis box." He dusted diem out into the basin. "Go get some then," die barber said. "The time has come," the executive went on, "just like Hawkson said, when we got to sit on the lid with both feet and a mule." He went on to review Hawkson's Fourth of July speech.

Rayber would like to have pushed him into the basin. The day was hot and full enough of flies without having to spend it listening to a fat fool. He could see the courthouse square, blue-green cool, through the tinted glass window. He wished to hell the barber would hurry. He fixed his attention on the square outside, feeling himself there where, he could tell from the trees, the air was moving slightly. A group of men sauntered up the courthouse walk. Rayber looked more closely and thought he recognized Jacobs. But Jacobs had a late afternoon class. It was Jacobs, though. Or was it. If it were, who was he talking to? Blakeley? Or was that Blakeley. He squinted. Three colored boys in zoot suits strolled by on the sidewalk. One dropped down on the pavement so that only his head was visible to Rayber, and the other two lounged over him, leaning against the barbershop window and making a hole in the view. Why the hell can't they park somewhere else? Rayber thought fiercely. "Hurry up," he said to the barber, "I have an appointment."

"What's your hurry?" the fat man said. "You better stay and stick up for Boy Blue." "You know you never told us why you're gonna vote for him," the barber chuckled, taking the cloth from around Rayber's neck. "Yeah," the fat man said, "see can you tell us without sayin',

goodgovermint." "I have an appointment," Rayber said. "I can't stay." "You just know Darmon is so sorry you won't be able to say a good word for him," the fat man howled.

"Listen," Rayber said, "I'll be back in here next week and I'll give you as many reasons for voting for Darmon as you want— better reasons than you've given me for voting for Hawkson."

"I'd like to see you do that," the barber said. "Because I'm telling

you, it can't be done." "All right, we'll see," Rayber said. "Remember," the fat man carped, "you ain't gonna say, good govermint."

"I won't say anything you can't understand," Rayber muttered and then felt foolish for showing his irritation. The fat man and the barber were grinning. "I'll see you Tuesday," Rayber said and left. He was disgusted with himself for saying he would give them reasons. Reasons would have to be worked out—systematically. He couldn't open his head in a second like they did. He wished to hell he could. He wished to hell "Mother Hubbard" weren't so accurate. He wished to hell Darmon spit tobacco juice. The reasons would have to be worked out—time and trouble. What was the matter with him? Why not work them out? He could make everything in that shop squirm if he put his mind to it.

By the time he got home, he had the beginnings of an outline for an argument. It would be filled in with no waste words, no big words—no easy job, he could see.

He got right to work on it. He worked on it until suppertime and had four sentences—all crossed out. He got up once in the middle of the meal to go to his desk and change one. After supper he crossed the correction out.

"What is the matter with you?" his wife wanted to know. "Not a thing," Rayber said, "not a thing. I just have to work." "I'm not stopping you," she said. When she went out, he kicked the board loose on the bottom of the desk. By eleven o'clock he had one page. The next morning it came easier, and he finished it by noon. He thought it was blunt enough. It began, "For two reasons, men elect other men to power," and it ended, "Men who use ideas without measuring them are walking on wind." He thought the last sentence was pretty effective. He thought the whole thing was effective enough.

In the afternoon he took it around to Jacob's office. Blakeley was there but he left. Rayber read the paper to Jacobs.

"Well," Jacobs said, "so what? What do you call yourself doing?" He had been jotting figures down on a record sheet all the time Rayber was reading.

Rayber wondered if he were busy. "Defending myself against barbers," he said. "You ever tried to argue with a barber?" "I never argue," Jacobs said. "That's because you don't know this kind of ignorance," Rayber

explained. "You've never experienced it." Jacobs snorted. "Oh yes I have," he said. "What happened?" "I never argue."

"But you know you're right," Rayber persisted. "I never argue." "Well, I'm going to argue," Rayber said. "I'm going to say die right dung as fast as diey can say die wrong. It'll be a question of speed. Understand," he went on, "this is no mission of conversion; I'm defending myself."

"I understand diat," Jacobs said. "I hope you're able to do it." "I've already done it! You read the paper. There it is." Rayber wondered if Jacobs were dense or preoccupied. "Okay, dien leave it there. Don't spoil your complexion arguing with barbers." "It's got to be done," Rayber said. Jacobs shrugged. Rayber had counted on discussing it with him at length. "Well, I'll see you," he said. "Okay," Jacobs said. Rayber wondered why he had ever read the paper to him in die first place.

Before he left for the barber's Tuesday afternoon, Rayber was nervous and he diought tiiat by way of practice he'd try die paper out on his wife. He didn't know but what she was for Hawkson herself. Whenever he mentioned the election, she made it a point to say, "Just because you teach doesn't mean you know everydiing." Did he ever say he knew anydung at all? Maybe he wouldn't call her. But he wanted to hear how the diing was actually going to sound said casually. It wasn't long; wouldn't take up much of her time. She would probably dislike being called. Still, she might possibly be affected by v/hat he said. Possibly. He called her.

She said all right, but he'd just have to wait until she got through what she was doing; it looked like every time she got her hands in somediing, she had to leave and go do somediing else.

He said he didn't have all day to wait—it was only forty-five minutes until die shop closed—and would she please hurry up? She came in wiping her hands and said all right; all right, she was there, wasn't she? Go ahead.

He began saying it very easily and casually, looking over her head. The sound of his voice playing over die words was not bad. He wondered if it were die words themselves or his tones diat made them sound the way they did. He paused in the middle of a sentence and glanced at his wife to see if her face would give him any clue. Her head was turned slightly toward the table by her chair where an open magazine was lying. As he paused, she got up. "That was very nice," she said and went back to the kitchen. Rayber left for the barber's.

He walked slowly, thinking what he was going to say in the shop and now and then stopping to look absently at a store window. Block's Feed Company had a display of automatic chicken-killers— "So Timid Persons Can Kill Their Own Fowl" the sign over them read. Rayber wondered if many timid persons used them. As he neared the barber's, he could see obliquely through the door the man with die executive assurance was sitting in the corner reading a newspaper. Rayber went in and hung up his hat.

"Howdy," the barber said. "Ain't diis the hottest day in the year, though!"

"It's hot enough," Rayber said.

"Hunting season soon be over," the barber commented.

All right, Rayber wanted to say, let's get diis thing going. He thought he would work into his argument from their remarks. The fat man hadn't noticed him.

"You should have seen the covey this dog of mine flushed the odier day," die barber went on as Rayber got in the chair. "The birds spread once and we got four and they spread again and we got two. That ain't bad."

"Never hunted quail," Rayber said hoarsely.

"There ain't nothing like taking a nigger and a hound dog and a gun and going after quail," the barber said. "You missed a lot out of life if you ain't had diat."

Rayber cleared his throat and the barber went on working. The fat man in the corner turned a page. What do they diink I came in here for? Rayber thought. They couldn't have forgotten. He waited, hearing the noises flies make and die mumble of die men talking in the back. The fat man turned another page. Rayber could hear George's broom slowly stroking die floor somewhere in die shop, then stop, dien scrape, then. . . . "You er, still a Hawkson man?" Rayber asked die barber.

"Yeah!" the barber laughed. "Yeah! You know I had forgot.
You was gonna tell us why you are voting for Darmon. Hey, Roy!" he yelled to the fat man, "come over here. We gonna hear why we should vote for Boy Blue."

Roy grunted and turned another page. "Be there when I finish diis piece," he mumbled. "What you got diere, Joe?" one of the men in the back called,

"one of them goodgovermint boys?" "Yeah," the barber said. "He's gonna make a speech." "I've heard too many of that kind already," die man said. "You ain't heard one by Rayber," the barber said. "Rayber's all right. He don't know how to vote, but he's all right." Rayber reddened. Two of the men strolled up. "This is no speech," Rayber said. "I only want to discuss it with you—sanely." "Come on over here, Roy," the barber yelled. "What are you trying to make of this?" Rayber muttered; tlien

he said suddenly, "If you're calling everybody else, why don't you call your boy, George. You afraid to have him listen?" The barber looked at Rayber for a second widiout saying anything. Rayber felt as if he had made himself too much at home. "He can hear," the barber said. "He can hear back where he is." "I just thought he might be interested," Rayber said. "He can hear," the barber repeated. "He can hear what he hears and he can hear two times that much. He can hear what you don't say as well as what you do." Roy came over folding his newspaper. "Howdy, boy," he said, putting his hand on Rayber's head, "let's get on with this speech."

Rayber felt as if he were fighting his way out of a net. They were over him with their red faces grinning. He heard die words drag out—"Well, die way I see it, men elect. . . ." He felt them pull out of his mouth like freight cars, jangling, backing up on each other, grating to a halt, sliding, clinching back, jarring, and tlien suddenly stopping as roughly as they had begun. It was over. Rayber was jarred diat it was over so soon. For a second—as if they were expecting him to go on—no one said anydiing.

Then, "How many yawl gonna vote for Boy Blue!" die barber yelled. Some of the men turned around and snickered. One doubled over.

"Me," Roy said. "I'm gonna run right down there now so I'll be first to vote for Boy Blue tomorrow morning."

"Listen!" Rayber shouted, "I'm not trying. . - •"

"George," the barber yelled, "you heard that speech?"

"Yessir," George said.

"Who you gonna vote for, George?"

"I'm not trying to. . . ." Rayber yelled.

"I don't know is they gonna let me vote," George said. "Do, I gonna vote for Mr. Hawkson."

"ListenI" Rayber yelled, "do you think I'm trying to change your fat minds? What do you think I am?" He jerked die barber around by die shoulder. "Do you think I'd tamper with your damn fool ignorance?"

The barber shook Rayber's grip off his shoulder. "Don't get excited," he said, "we all thought it was a fine speech. That's what I been saying all along—you got to think, you got to. . . ." He lurched backward when Rayber hit him, and landed sitting on the footrest of the next chair. "Thought it was fine," he finished, looking steadily at Rayber's white, half-lathered face glaring down at him. "It's what I been saying all along."

The blood began pounding up Rayber's neck just under his skin. He turned and pushed quickly through die men around him to die door. Outside, the sun

was suspending everything in a pool of heat, and before he had turned die first corner, almost running, lather began to drip inside his collar and down the barber's bib, dangling to his knees.

Wildcat

OLD GABRIEL shuffled across the room waving his stick slowly sideways in front of him. "Who that?" he whispered, appearing in die doorway. "I smells fo' niggers."

Their soft, minor-toned laughter rose above the frog's hum and

blended into voices. "Cain't you do no bettern that, Gabe?" "Is you goin' widi us, Granpaw?" "You oughter be able to smell good enough to git our names." Old Gabriel moved out on the porch a little way. "That Matthew an' George an' Willie Myrick. An' who that odier?" "This Boon Williams, Granpaw." Gabriel felt for the edge of the porch with his stick. "What yawl doin'? Set down a spell." "We waitin' on Mose an' Luke." "We goin' huntin' diat cat." "What yawl huntin' him with?" old Gabriel muttered. "Yawl ain't got nothin' fit to kill a wildcat widi." He sat down on die edge of die porch and hung his feet over die side. "I done tol' Mose an' Luke that."

"How many wildcats you killed, Gabrul?" Their voices, rising to him through die darkness, were full of gentle mockery.

"When I was a boy, diere was a cat once," Gabriel started. "It come 'round here huntin' blood. Come in dirough die winder of a cabin one night an' sprung in bed widi a nigger an' tore that nigger's tiiroat open befo' he could holler good."

"This cat in die woods, Granpaw. It jus' come out to git cows. Jupe Williams seen it when he gone dirough to die sawmill."

"What he done about it?" "Started runnin'." Their laughter broke over the night sounds

again. "He thought it was after him." "It was," old Gabriel murmured. "It after cows." Gabriel sniffed. "It comin' out die woods for mo' dian cows. It gonna git itssef some folks' blood. You watch. An' yawl goin' off huntin' it ain't gonna do no good. It goin' huntin' itssef. I been smellin' it."

"How you know that it you smellin'?" "Ain't no mistakin' a wildcat. Ain't been one 'round here since I

was a boy. Why don't yawl set a spell?" he added. "You ain't afraid to stay here by yosef, is you, Granpaw?" Old Gabriel stiffened. He felt for the post to pull himself up on.

"Ef you waitin' on Mose an' Luke," he said, "you better git goin'. They started over to yawl's place an hour ago."

"Come in here, I say I Come in here right now I" The blind boy sat alone on the steps, staring ahead. "All the men gone?" he called. "All gone but ol' Hezuh. Come in." He hated to go in—among the women. "I smells it," he said. "You come in here, Gabriel." He went in and walked to where the window was. The women were muttering at him. "You stay in here, boy." "You be 'tractin' that cat right in this room, settin' out there." No air was coming through die window, and he scratched at die shutter latch to open it. "Don't open that winder, boy. Us don't want no wildcat jumpin' in here." "I could er gone wit 'em," he said sullenly. "I could er smelled it out. I ain't afraid." Shut up wit diese women like he one too.

"Reba say she kin smell it herself."

He heard the old woman groan in die corner. "They ain't gonna do no good out huntin' it," she whined. "It here. It right around here. Ef it jump in this room it gonna git me fust, then it gonna git that boy, then it gonna git. . . ."

"Hush yo' mouth, Reba," he heard his mother say. "I look after my boy."

He could look after hissef. He warn't afraid. He could smell it— him an' Reba could. It'd jump on tiiem fust; fust Reba an' then him. It was the shape of a reg'lar cat only bigger, his motlier said. An' where you felt the sharp points on a house cat's foot, you felt big knife claws in a wildcat's, an' knife teeth, too; an' it breathed heat an' spit wet lime. Gabriel could feel its claws in his shoulders and its teeth in his throat. But he wouldn't let 'em stay there. He'd lock his arms 'round its body an' feel up for its neck an' jerk its head back an' go down wit it on the floor until its claws dropped away from his shoulders. Beat, beat, beat its head, beat, beat beat. . ..

"Who wit ol' Hezuh?" one of die women asked. "Jus' Nancy." "Oughter be somebody else down there," his mother said softly. Reba moaned. "Anybody go out gonna git sprung on befo' they gits tliere. It around here, I say. It gittin' closer an' closer. It gonna git me sho." He could smell it strong. "How it gonna git in here? Yawl jus' frettin' for nothin'." That was Thin Minnie. Nothin' could git her. She'd had a spell on her since when she was small—put there by a conjer woman. "It come in easy ef it wanter," Reba snorted. "It tear up that cat hole an' come through." "We could be down to Nancy's by tiien," Minnie sniffed. "Yawl could," the old woman muttered. Him an' her couldn't, he knew. But he'd stay an' fight it. You see that blin' boy there? He the one kill the wildcat! Reba started groaning.

"Hush that!" his modier ordered. The groaning turned into singing—low in her throat.

"Lord, Lord,
Gonna see yo' pilgrim today.
Lord, Lord,
Gonna see yo' . . ."

"Hush!" his mother hissed. "What that I hear?"

Gabriel leaned forward in the silence; stiff, ready.

It was a thump, thump and maybe a snarl, away, muffled, and then a shriek, far away, then louder and louder, closer and closer, over the edge of the hill into the yard and up on the porch. The cabin was shaking with the weight of a body against the door. There was the feel of a rush inside the room and the scream was let in. Nancy!

"It got him!" she screamed. "Got him, sprung in through the winder, got him in the throat. Hezuh," she wailed, "ol' Hezuh." Later in the night the men returned, carrying a rabbit and two squirrels.

in

Old Gabriel crept back through the darkness to his bed. He could sit in the chair a while or he could lie down. He eased down in the bed and pushed his nose into the feel and smell of the quilt. They won't no use to do that. He could smell the other jus' the same. He had been smellin' it, been smellin' it ever since they started talkin' about it. There it was one evenin'—different from all the smells around, different from niggers' and cows' an' ground smells. Wildcat. Tull Williams seen it jump on a bull.

Gabriel sat up suddenly. It was nearer. He got out the bed and pushed to the door. He had bolted that one; the other must be open. A breeze was coming in and he walked in it until he felt the night air full in his face. This one was open. He slammed it shut and pushed the bolt in. What was the use to do that? Ef the cat aimed on comin' in, it could git there. He went back to the chair and sat down. It come in east ef it wanta. There were little drafts all around him. By the door there was a hole the hound could git under; that cat could gnaw it through an' be in befo' he got out. Maybe ef he sat by the back do', he could git away quicker. He got up and dragged his chair after him across the room. The smell was near. Maybe he'd count. He could count to a thousand. Won't no nigger for five miles could count that fur. He started counting.

Mose an' Luke wouldn't be back for six hours yet. Tomorrow night diey wouldn't go; but die cat was gonna git him tonight. Lemme go wit you boys an' smell him out for you. I die onliest one kin smell 'round here.

They'd lose him in the woods, they'd said. Huntin' wildcats won't no business for him. I ain't afraid er no wildcat er no woods neither. Lemme go wit you boys, lemme go.

Ain't no reason to be 'fraid to stay here by yosef, they'd laughed. Ain't nothin' gonna git you. We take you up the road to Mattie's ef you scaird.

Mattie's! Take him to Mattie's! Settin' wit the women. What yawl think I is? I ain't afraid er no wildcat. But it comin', boys; an' it ain't gonna be in no woods—it gonna be here. Yawl wastin' yo' time in the woods. Stay here an' you ketch it.

He suppose to be countin'. Where he lef off at? Five hunnert an' five, five hunnert an' six . . . Mattie's! What they think he is? Five hunnert an' two, five hunnert an'. . . .

He sat stiff in the chair with his hands gripped tight to the stick across his knees. It won't gonna git him like he was a woman. His shirt was stuck wet to him, making him smell higher. The men had come back later in die night with a rabbit and two squirrels. He began to remember die odier wildcat and he remembered as if he had been in Hezuh's cabin instead of widi die women. He wondered was he Hezuh. He was Gabrul. It won't gonna git him like Hezuh. He was gonna hit it. He was gonna pull it off. He was gonna . . . how he gonna do all that ? He hadn't been able to wring a chicken's neck for fo' years. It was gonna git him. Won't nodiin' to do but wait. The smell was near. Won't nodiin' for old people to do but wait. It was gonna git him tonight. The teetli would be hot an' the claws cold. The claws would sink in soft, an' die teedi would cut sharp an' scrape his bones inside.

Gabriel felt the sweat on himself. It kin smell me good's I kin smell it, he thought. I settin' here smellin' an' it comin' here smellin'.

Two hunnert an' fo'; where he lef' off at? Fo' hunncrt an' five. . . .

There was a sudden scratching by the chimney. He sat forward, tense, tight-throated. "Come on," he whispered, "I here. I waitin'." He couldn't move. He couldn't make himself move. There was another scratching. It was the pain he didn't want. But he didn't want the waiting either. "I here," he—there was another, just a small noise and then a flutter. Bats. His grip on the stick loosened. He should have known diat won't it. It won't no farther than the barn yet. What ail his nose? What ail him? Won't no nigger for hunnert miles could smell like he could. He heard the scratching again, coming differently, coming from the corner of the house where the cat hole was. Pick . . . pick . . . pick. That was a bat. He knowd that was a bat. Pick . . . pick. "Here I is," he whispered. Won't no bat. He braced his feet to get up. Pick. "Lord waitin' on me," he whispered. "He don't want me with my face tore open. Why don't you go on, Wildcat, why you want

me?" He was on his feet now. "Lord don't want me with no wildcat marks." He was moving toward die cat hole. Across on the river bank the Lord was waiting on him with a troupe of angels and golden vestments for him to put on and when he came, he'd put on die vestments and stand there with the Lord and the angels, judging life. Won't no nigger for fifty miles fitter to judge than him. Pick. He stopped. He smelled it right outside, nosing the hole. He had to climb onto something! What he going toward it for? He had to get on something high! There was a shelf nailed over the chimney and he turned wildly and fell against a chair and shoved it up to the fireplace. He caught hold of die shelf and pulled himself onto the chair and sprang up and backwards and felt the narrow shelf board under him for an instant and dien felt it sag and jerked his feet up and felt it crack somewhere from the wall. His stomach flew inside him and stopped hard and the shelf board fell across his feet and the rung of the chair hit against his head and then, after a second of stillness, he heard a low, gasping animal cry wail over two hills and fade past him; then snarls, tearing short, furious, through die pain wails. Gabriel sat stiff on the floor.

"Cow," he breathed finally. "Cow." Gradually he felt his muscles loosen. It got to her befo' him. It would go on off now, but it would be back tomorrer night. He rose

shaking from the chair and stumbled to his bed. The cat had been a half mile away. He won't sharp like he used to be. They shouldn't leave old people by theyselves. He done tole 'em they won't gonna ketch nothin' off in no woods. Tomorrer night it would come back. Tomorrer night they would stay here an' kill it. Now he want to sleep. He done tole 'em they couldn't get no wildcat in no woods. He the one tole 'em where it gonna be. They'd a listened to him, they'd done had it by now. When he die he want to be sleepin' in a bed; didn't want to be on no floor with a wildcat stuck in his face.
Lord waitin'.

When he woke up, the darkness was full of morning things. He heard Mose and Luke at *the* stove and smelled the side meat in the skillet. He reached for his snuff and filled his lip. "What yawl ketch?" he asked trenchantly.

"Ain't caught nodiin' las' night." Luke put the plate in his hands. "Here yo' side meat. How you bust that shelf?"

'"Ain't busted no shelf," old Gabriel muttered. "Wind to' it down and waked me up in the middle of the night. It been due to fall. You ain't never built nothin' yet stayed together."

"We sot a trap," Mose said. "We git that cat tonight."

"Yawl sho will, boys," Gabriel said. "It'll be right here tonight.

Ain't it done kill a cow a half a mile from here las' night?"

"That don't mean it comin' this way," Luke said.

"It comin' this way," Gabriel said.

"How many wildcats you killed, Granpaw?"

Gabriel stopped; the plate of side meat tremored in his hand.

"I knows what I knows, boy."

"We git it soon. We sot a trap over in Ford's Woods. It been around there. We goin' up in a tree over the trap every night an' wait 'til we gits it."

Their forks were scraping back and forth over their tin plates like knife teeth against stone.

"You wants sommo' side meat, Granpaw?"

Gabriel put his fork down on the quilt. "No, boy," he said, "no mo' side meat." The darkness was hollow around him and through its depth, animal cries wailed and mingled widi die beats pounding in his throat.

The Crop

Miss WILLERTON always crumbed the table. It was her particular household accomplishment and she did it with great dioroughness. Lucia and Berdia did die dishes and Garner went into die parlor and did the *Morning Press* crossword puzzle. That left Miss Willerton in the dining room by herself and diat was all right widi Miss Willerton. Whew! Breakfast in that house was always an ordeal. Lucia insisted diat they have a regular hour for breakfast just like they did for other meals. Lucia said a regular breakfast made for other regular habits, and widi Garner's tendency to upsets, it was imperative that they establish some system in their eating. This way she could also see that he put the Agar-Agar on his Cream of Wheat. As if, Miss Willerton thought, after having done it for fifty years, he'd be capable of doing anything else. The breakfast dispute always started with Garner's Cream of Wheat and ended widi her diree spoonfuls of pineapple crush. "You know your acid, Willie," Miss Lucia would always say, "you know your acid"; and then Garner would roll his eyes and make some sickening remark and Bertha would jump and Lucia would look distressed and Miss Willerton would taste die pineapple crush she had already swallowed. It was a relief to crumb die table. Crumbing die table gave one time to think, and if Miss Willerton were going to write a story, she had to think about it first. She could usually think best sitting in front of her typewriter, but this would do for the time being. First, she had to think of a subject to write a story about. There were so many subjects to write stories about that Miss Willerton never could diink of one. That was always die hardest part of writing a story, she always said. She spent more time thinking of something to write about than she did writing. Sometimes she discarded subject after subject and it usually took her a week or two to decide finally on something. Miss Willerton got out the silver crumber and die crumb-catcher and started stroking the table. I wonder, she mused, if a baker would make a good subject? Foreign bakers were very picturesque, she thought. Aunt Myrtile Filmer had left her four color-tints of French bakers in mushroom-looking hats. They were great tall fellows—blond and. . . .

"Willie!" Miss Lucia screamed, entering the dining room with the saltcellars. "For heaven's sake, hold the catcher under die crumber or you'll have those crumbs on the rug. I've Bisseled it four times in die last week and I am not going to do it again."

"You have not Bisseled it on account of any crumbs I have spilled," Miss Willerton said tersely. "I always pick up the crumbs I drop," and she added, "I

drop relatively few."

"And wash die crumber before you put it up this time," Miss Lucia returned.

Miss Willerton drained die crumbs into her hand and direw diem out die window. She took the catcher and crumber to die kitchen and ran diem under die cold-water faucet. She dried diem and stuck diem back in the drawer. That was over. Now she could get to die typewriter. She could stay diere until dinnertime.

Miss Willerton sat down at her typewriter and let out her breadi. Now! What had she been thinking about? Oh. Bakers. Hmmm. Bakers. No, bakers wouldn't do. Hardly colorful enough. No social tension connected with bakers. Miss Willerton sat staring dirough her typewriter. A S D F G—her eyes wandered over die keys. Hmmm. Teachers? Miss Willerton wondered. No. Heavens no. Teachers always made Miss Willerton feel peculiar. Her teachers at Willowpool Seminary had been all right but diey were women. Willowpool Female Seminary, Miss Willerton remembered. She didn't like the phrase, Willowpool Female Seminary—it sounded biological. She always just said she was a graduate of Willowpool. Men teachers made Miss Willerton feel as if she were going to mispronounce something. Teachers weren't timely anyhow. They weren't even a social problem.

Social problem. Social problem. Hmmm. Sharecroppers! Miss Willerton had never been intimately connected with sharecroppers but, she reflected, diey would make as arty a subject as any, and diey would give her that air of social concern which was so valuable to have in the circles she was hoping to travel I "I can always capitalize," she muttered, "on the hookworm." It was coming to her now! Certainly I Her fingers plinked excitedly over die keys, never touching diem. Then suddenly she began typing at great speed.

"Lot Motun," the typewriter registered, "called his dog." "Dog" was followed by an abrupt pause. Miss Willerton always did her best work on die first sentence. "First sentences," she always said, "came to her—like a flash! Just like a flash!" she would say and snap her fingers, "like a flash!" And she built her story up from them. "Lot Motun called his dog" had been automatic with Miss Willerton, and reading die sentence over, she decided that not only was "Lot Motun" a good name for a sharecropper, but also that having him call his dog was an excellent thing to have a sharecropper do. "The dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to Lot." Miss Willerton had die sentence down before she realized her error—two "Lots" in one paragraph. That was displeasing to the ear. The typewriter grated back and Miss Willerton applied three x's to "Lot." Over it she wrote in pencil, "him." Now she was ready to go again. "Lot Motun called his dog. The dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to him." Two dogs, too, Miss Willerton thought. Ummm. But that didn't affect die ears like two "Lots," she

decided.

Miss Willerton was a great believer in what she called "phonetic art." She maintained diat die ear was as much a reader as the eye. She liked to express it diat way. "The eye forms a picture," she had told a group at the United Daughters of the Colonies, "that can be painted in the abstract, and die success of a literary venture" (Miss Willerton liked die phrase, 'literary venture') "depends on the abstract created in die mind and the tonal quality" (Miss Willerton also liked 'tonal quality') "registered in the ear." There was something biting and sharp about "Lot Motun called his dog"; followed by "die dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to him," it gave the paragraph just die send-off it needed.

"He pulled die animal's short, scraggy ears and rolled over with it in die mud." Perhaps, Miss Willerton mused, that would be over doing it. But a sharecropper, she knew, might reasonably be expected to roll over in the mud. Once she had read a novel dealing with that kind of people in which they had done just as bad and, throughout three-fourths of the narrative, much worse. Lucia found it in cleaning out one of Miss Willerton's bureau drawers and after glancing at a few random pages took it between thumb and index finger to the furnace and threw it in. "When I was cleaning your bureau out this morning, Willie, I found a book that Garner must have put there for a joke," Miss Lucia told her later. "It was awful, but you know how Garner is. I burned it." And then, tittering, she added, "I was sure it couldn't be yours." Miss Willerton was sure it could be none other's than hers but she hesitated in claiming the distinction. She had ordered it from the publisher because she didn't want to ask for it at the library. It had cost her $3.75 with the postage and she had not finished the last four chapters. At least, she had got enough from it, though, to be able to say that Lot Motun might reasonably roll over in the mud with his dog. Having him do that would give more point to the hookworm, too, she decided. "Lot Motun called his dog. The dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to him. He pulled the animal's short, scraggy ears and rolled over with it in the mud."

Miss Willerton settled back. That was a good beginning. Now she would plan her action. There had to be a woman, of course. Perhaps Lot could kill her. That type of woman always started trouble. She might even goad him on to kill her because of her wantonness and then he would be pursued by his conscience maybe.

He would have to have principles if that were going to be the case, but it would be fairly easy to give him those. Now how was she going to work that in with all the love interest there'd have to be, she wondered. There would have to

be some quite violent, naturalistic scenes, the sadistic sort of thing one read of in connection with that class. It was a problem. However, Miss Willerton enjoyed such problems. She liked to plan passionate scenes best of all, but when she came to write them, she always began to feel peculiar and to wonder what the family would say when they read tJiem. Garner would snap his fingers and wink at her at every opportunity; Bertha would diink she was terrible; and Lucia would say in that silly voice of hers, "What have you been keeping from us, Willie? What have you been keeping from us?" and titter like she always did. But Miss Willerton couldn't think about that now; she had to plan her characters.

Lot would be tall, stooped, and shaggy but with sad eyes that made him look like a gentleman in spite of his red neck and big fumbling hands. He'd have straight teeth and, to indicate that he had some spirit, red hair. His clothes would hang on him but he'd wear them nonchalantly like they were part of his skin; maybe, she mused, he'd better not roll over with the dog after all. The woman would be more or less pretty—yellow hair, fat ankles, muddy-colored eyes.

She would get supper for him in the cabin and he'd sit there eating the lumpy grits she hadn't bothered to put salt in and thinking about something big, something way off—another cow, a painted house, a clean well, a farm of his own even. The woman would yowl at him for not cutting enough wood for her stove and would whine about the pain in her back. She'd sit and stare at him eating the sour grits and say he didn't have nerve enough to steal food. "You're just a damn beggar!" she'd sneer. Then he'd tell her to keep quiet. "Shut your mouth!" he'd shout. "I've taken all I'm gonna." She'd roll her eyes, mocking him, and laugh—"I ain't afraid er nothin' that looks like you." Then he'd push his chair behind him and head toward her. She'd snatch a knife off the table—Miss Willerton wondered what kind of a fool the woman was—and back away holding it in front of her. He'd lunge forward but she'd dart from him like a wild horse. Then they'd face each other again—dieir eyes brimming with hate—and sway back and forth. Miss Willerton could hear the seconds dropping on the tin roof outside. He'd dart at her again but she'd have the knife ready and would plunge it into him in an instant—Miss Willerton could stand it no longer. She struck the woman a terrific blow on the head from behind. The knife dropped out of her hands and a mist swept her from the room. Miss Willerton turned to Lot. "Let me get you some hot grits," she said. She went over to the stove and got a clean plate of smooth white grits and a piece of butter.

"Gee, thanks," Lot said and smiled at her with his nice teeth.
"You always fix 'em just right. You know," he said, "I been thinkin'—we could get out of this tenant farm. We could have a decent place. If we made anything this year over, we could put it in a cow an' start buildin' things up. Think what it

would mean, Willie, just think."

She sat down beside him and put her hand on his shoulder. "We'll do it," she said. "We'll make better than we've made any year and by spring we should have us that cow."

"You always know how I feel, Willie," he said. "You always have known." They sat there for a long time thinking of how well they understood each other. "Finish your food," she said finally.

After he had eaten, he helped her take the ashes out die stove and then, in the hot July evening, they walked down the pasture toward the creek and talked about the place *they* were going to have some day.

When late March came and the rainy season was almost there, they had accomplished almost more than was believable. For the past month, Lot had been up every morning at five, and Willy an hour earlier to get in all the work they could while the weadier was clear. Next week, Lot said, die rain would probably start and if they didn't get the crop in by then, they would lose it—and all they had gained in the past months. They knew what that meant— another year of getting along widi no more than they'd had the last. Then too, there'd be a baby next year instead of a cow. Lot had wanted die cow anyway. "Children don't cost all that much to feed," he'd argued, "an' the cow would help feed him," but Willie had been firm—the cow could come later—the child must have a good start. "Maybe," Lot had said finally, "we'll have enough for both," and he had gone out to look at the new-plowed ground as if he could count die harvest from the furrows.

Even with as little as they'd had, it had been a good year. Willie had cleaned the shack, and Lot had fixed the chimney. There was a profusion of petunias by the doorstep and a colony of snapdragons under the window. It had been a peaceful year. But now they were becoming anxious over die crop. They must gather it before the rain. "We need anodier week," Lot muttered when he came in diat night.

"One more week an' we can do it. Do you feel like gatherin'? It isn't right that you should have to," he sighed, "but I can't hire any help." "I'm all right," she said, hiding her trembling hands behind her.

"I'll gather." "It's cloudy tonight," Lot said darkly. The next day they worked until nightfall—worked until they could work no longer and then stumbled back to the cabin and fell into bed.

Willie woke in the night conscious of a pain. It was a soft, green pain with purple lights running through it. She wondered if she were awake. Her head

rolled from side to side and there were droning shapes grinding boulders in it.

Lot sat up. "Are you bad off?" he asked, trembling. She raised herself on her elbow and then sank down again. "Get Anna up by the creek," she gasped.

The droning became louder and the shapes grayer. The pain intermingled with them for seconds first, then interminably. It came again and again. The sound of the droning grew more distinct and toward morning she realized that it was rain. Later she asked hoarsely, "How long has it been raining?"

"Most two days, now," Lot answered. "Then we lost." Willie looked listlessly out at the dripping trees.

"It's over." "It isn't over," he said softly. "We got a daughter." "You wanted a son." "No, I got what I wanted—two Willies instead of one—that's better than a cow, even," he grinned. "What can I do to deserve all I got, Willie?" He bent over and kissed her forehead. "What can I?" she asked slowly. "And what can I do to help you

more?" "How about your going to die grocery, Willie?" Miss Willerton shoved Lot away from her. "W-what did you say, Lucia?" she stuttered. "I said how about your going to the grocery diis time? I've been every morning this week and I'm busy now." Miss Willerton pushed back from the typewriter. "Very well," she said sharply. "What do you want there?" "A dozen eggs and two pounds of tomatoes—ripe tomatoes—

and you'd better start doctoring that cold right now. Your eyes are already watering and you're hoarse. There's Empirin in the ballroom. Write a check on die house for the groceries. And wear your coat. It's cold."

Miss Willerton rolled her eyes upward. "I am forty-four years old," she announced, "and able to take care of myself."

"And get ripe tomatoes," Miss Lucia returned.

Miss Willerton, her coat buttoned unevenly, tramped up Broad Street and into the supermarket. "What was it now?" she muttered. "Two dozen eggs and a pound of tomatoes, yes." She passed die lines of canned vegetables and the crackers and headed for die box where die eggs were kept. But diere were no eggs. "Where are the eggs?" she asked a boy weighing snapbeans.

"We ain't got nothin' but pullet eggs," he said, fishing up anodier handful of beans. "Well, where are they and what is the difference?" Miss Willerton demanded.

He threw several beans back into die bin, slouched over to die egg box and handed her a carton. "There ain't no difference really," he said, pushing his gum over his front teedi. "A teen-age chicken

or somethin', I don't know. You want 'em?"

"Yes, and two pounds of tomatoes. Ripe tomatoes," Miss Willerton added. She did not like to do the shopping. There was no reason those clerks should be so condescending. That boy wouldn't have dawdled with Lucia. She paid for the eggs and tomatoes and left hurriedly. The place depressed her somehow.

Silly that a grocery should depress one—nothing in it but trifling domestic doings—women buying beans—riding children in diose grocery go-carts—higgling about an eighdi of a pound more or less of squash—what did diey get out of it? Miss Willerton wondered. Where was there any chance for self-expression, for creation, for art? All around her it was the same—sidewalks full of people scurrying about with their hands full of little packages and their minds full of little packages—that woman there widi the child on the leash, pulling him, jerking him, dragging him away from a window with a jack-o'-lantern in it; she would probably be pulling and jerking him the rest of her life. And diere was another, dropping a shopping bag all over the street, and another wiping a child's nose, and up die street an old woman was coming with three grandchildren jumping all over her, and behind diem was a couple walking too close for refinement.

Miss Willerton looked at die couple sharply as tliey came nearer and passed. The woman was plump widi yellow hair and fat ankles and muddy-colored eyes. She had on high-heel pumps and blue anklets, a too-short cotton dress, and a plaid jacket. Her skin was mottled and her neck dirust forward as if she were sticking it out to smell sometliing that was always being drawn away. Her face was set in an inane grin. The man was long and wasted and shaggy. His shoulders were stooped and tiiere were yellow knots along the side of his large, red neck. His hands fumbled stupidly witli die girl's as they slumped along, and once or twice he smiled sickly at her and Miss Willerton could see diat he had straight teeth and sad eyes and a rash over his forehead.

"Ugh," she shuddered.

Miss Willerton laid die groceries on die kitchen tabic and went back to her typewriter. She looked at die paper in it. "Lot Motun called his dog," it read. "The dog pricked up its ears and slunk over to him. He pulled die animal's short, scraggy ears and rolled over witli it in die mud."

"That sounds awful!" Miss Willerton muttered. "It's not a good subject anyway," she decided. She needed sometliing more colorful —more arty. Miss Willerton looked at her typewriter for a long time. Then of a sudden her fist hit die desk in several ecstatic little bounces. "The Irish!" she squealed. "The Irish!"

Miss Willerton had always admired the Irish. Their brogue, she thought, was full of music; and dieir history—splendid! And die people, she mused, die Irish people! They were full of spirit—red-haired, widi broad shoulders and great, drooping mustaches.

The Turkey

His guns glinted sun steel in the ribs of the tree and, half aloud through a crack in his mouth, he growled, "All right, Mason, tJiis is as far as you go. The jig's up." The six-shooters in Mason's belt stuck out like waiting rattlers but he flipped them into the air and, when they fell at his feet, kicked them behind him like so many dried steer skulls. "You varmit," he muttered, drawing his rope tight around the captured man's ankles, "this is the last rustlin' you'll do." He took three steps backward and leveled one gun to his eye. "Okay," he said with cold, slow precision, "this is. . . ." And then he saw it, just moving slightly through die bushes farther over, a touch of bronze and a rustle and then, through another gap in the leaves, the eye, set in red folds that covered the head and hung down along the neck, trembling slightly. He stood perfectly still and the turkey took another step, then stopped, with one foot lifted, and listened.

If he only had a gun, if he only had a gun! He could level aim and shoot it right where it was. In a second, it would slide through the bushes and be up in a tree before he could tell which direction it had gone in. Without moving his head, he strained his eyes to the ground to see if there were a stone near, but the ground looked as if it might just have been swept. The turkey moved again. The foot that had been poised half way up went down and the wing dropped over it, spreading so that Ruller could see the long single feathers, pointed at the end. He wondered if he dived into the bush on top of it. . . . It moved again and the wing came up again and it went down.

It's limping, he thought quickly. He moved a little nearer, trying to make his motion imperceptible. Suddenly its head pierced out of the bush—he was about ten feet from it—and drew back and then abruptly back into die bush. He began edging nearer with his arms rigid and his fingers ready to clutch. It was lame, he could tell. It might not be able to fly. It shot its head out once more and saw him and shuttled back into the bushes and out again on the other side. Its motion was half lopsided and the left wing was dragging. He was going to get it. He was going to get it if he had to chase it out of the county. He crawled through the brush and saw it about twenty feet away, watching him warily, moving its neck up and down. It stooped and tried to spread its wings and stooped again and went a little way to die side and stooped again, trying to make itself go up; but, he could tell, it couldn't fly. He was going to have it. He was going to have it if he had to

run it out of the state. He saw himself going in the front door with it slung over his shoulder, and tiiem all screaming, "Look at Ruller widi that wild turkey! Ruller! where did you get that wild turkey?"

Oh, he had caught it in die woods; he had thought they might like to have him catch diem one.

"You crazy bird," he muttered, "you can't fly. I've already got you." He was walking in a wide circle, trying to get behind it. For a second, he almost thought he could go pick it up. It had dropped down and one foot was sprawled, but when he got near enough to pounce, it shot of? in a heavy speed diat made him start. He tore after it, straight out in the open for a half acre of dead cotton; then it went under a fence and into some woods again and he had to get on his hands and knees to get under the fence but still keep his eye on the turkey but not tear his shirt; and then dash after it again widi his head a little dizzy, but faster to catch up widi it. If he lost it in die woods, it would be lost for good; it was going for die bushes on the odier side. It would go on out in die road. He was going to have it. He saw it dart through a thicket and he headed for the diicket and when he got diere it darted out again and in a second disappeared under a hedge. He went through die hedge fast and heard his shirt rip and felt cool streaks on his arms where they were getting scratched. He stopped a second and looked down at his torn shirt sleeves but the turkey was only a little ahead of him and he could see it go over die edge of die hill and down again into an open space and he darted on. If he came in with the turkey, they wouldn't pay any attention to his shirt. Hane hadn't ever got a turkey. Hane hadn't ever caught anything. He guessed they'd be knocked out when they saw him; he guessed they'd talk about it in bed. That's what they did about him and Hane. Hane didn't know; he never woke up. Ruller woke up every night exactly at die time they started talking. He and Hane slept in one room and their mother and father in the next and die door was left open between and every night Ruller listened. His father would say finally, "How are the boys doing?" and their mother would say, Lord, they were wearing her to a frazzle, Lord, she guessed she shouldn't worry but how could she help worrying about Hane, the way he was now? Hane had always been an unusual boy, she said. She said he would grow up to be an unusual man too; and their father said yes, if he didn't get put in die penitentiary first, and tlieir motlier said how could he talk that way? and they argued just like Ruller and Hane and sometimes Ruller couldn't get back to sleep for thinking. He always felt tired when he got through listening but he woke up every night and listened just the same, and whenever they started talking about him, he sat up in bed so he could hear better. Once his father asked why Ruller played by himself so much and his motlier said how was she to know? if he wanted to play

by himself, she didn't see any reason he shouldn't; and his father said that worried him and she said well, if tliat was all he had to worry about, he'd do well to stop; someone told her, she said, tliat they had seen Hane at die Ever-Ready; hadn't diey told him.he couldn't go tliere?

His father asked Ruller die next day what he had been doing lately and Ruller said, "playing by himself," and walked off sort of like he had a limp. He guessed his fadier had looked pretty worried. He guessed he'd diink it was something when he came home widi die turkey slung over his shoulder. The turkey was heading out into a road and for a gutter along die side of it. It ran along the gutter and Ruller was gaining on it all the time until he fell over a root sticking up and spilled the things out of his pockets and had to snatch them up. When he got up, it was out of sight.

"Bill, you take a posse and go down South Canyon; Joe, you cut around by the gorge and head him off," he shouted to his men.

"I'll follow him this way." And he dashed off again along the ditch.

The turkey was in the ditch, not thirty feet from him, lying almost on its neck panting, and he was nearly a yard from it before it darted off again. He chased it straight until the ditch ended and then it went out in the road and slid under a hedge on the other side. He had to stop at the hedge and catch his breath and he could see the turkey on die other side through the leaves, lying on its neck, its whole body moving up and down with the panting. He could see the tip of its tongue going up and down in its opened bill. If he could stick his arm through, he might could get it while it was still too tired to move. He pushed up closer to the hedge and eased his hand through and then gripped it quickly around the turkey's tail. There was no movement from die other side. Maybe the turkey had dropped dead. He put his face close to the leaves to look through. He pushed die twigs aside widi one hand but they would not stay. He let go die turkey and pulled his other hand through to hold them. Through the hole he had made, he saw die bird wobbling off drunkenly. He ran back to where die hedge began and got on the odier side. He'd get it yet. It needn't diink it was so smart, he muttered.

It zigged across the middle of the field and toward the woods again. It couldn't go into the woods! He'd never get it! He dashed behind it, keeping his eyes sharp on it until suddenly somediing hit his chest and knocked the breath black out of him. He fell back on die ground and forgot die turkey for the cutting in his chest. He lay diere for a while widi things rocking on eidier side of him. Finally he sat up. He was facing die tree he had run into. He rubbed his hands over his face and arms and the long scratches began to sting. He would have taken it in slung over his shoulder and diey would have jumped up and yelled, "Good Lord look at

Ruller! Ruller! Where did you get diat wild turkey?" and his fadier would have said, "Man! That's a bird if I ever saw one!" He kicked a stone away from his foot. He'd never see die turkey now. He wondered why he had seen it in the first place if he wasn't going to be able to get it.

It was like somebody had played a dirty trick on him.

All diat running for nodiing. He sat dicre looking sullenly at his white ankles sticking out of his trouser legs and into his shoes. "Nuts," he muttered. He turned over on his stomach and let his cheek rest right on die ground, dirty or not. He had torn his shirt and scratched his arms and got a knot on his forehead—he could feel it rising just a little, it was going to be a big one all right—all for nothing. The ground was cool to his face, but the grit bruised it and he had to turn over. Oh hell, he thought.

"Oh hell," he said cautiously.

Then in a minute he said just, "Hell."

Then he said it like Hane said it, pulling die e-ull out and trying to get die look in his eye diat Hane got. Once Hane said, "GodI" and his modier stomped after him and said, "I don't want to hear you say that again. Thou shalt not take die name of die Lord, Thy God, in vain. Do you hear me?" and he guessed diat shut Hane up. Ha! He guessed she dressed him off that time.

"God," he said. He looked studiedly at die ground, making circles in the dust widi his finger. "God!" he repeated.

"God dammit," he said softly. He could feel his face getting hot and his chest thumping all of a sudden inside. "God dammit to hell," he said almost inaudibly. He looked over his shoulder but no one was there.

"God dammit to hell, good Lord from Jerusalem," he said. His uncle said "Good Lord from Jerusalem."

"Good Father, good God, sweep the chickens out die yard," he said and began to giggle. His face was very red. He sat up and looked at his white ankles sticking out of his pants legs into his shoes. They looked like they didn't belong to him. He gripped a hand around each ankle and bent his knees up and rested his chin on a knee. "Our Fadier Who art in heaven, shoot 'em six and roll 'em seven," he said, giggling again. Boy, she'd smack his head in if she could hear him. God dammit, she'd smack his goddam head in. He rolled over in a fit of laughter. God dammit, she'd dress him off and wring his goddam neck like a goddam chicken. The laughing cut his side and he tried to hold it in, but every dme he thought of his goddam neck, he shook again. He lay back on die ground, red

and weak widi laughter, not able not to think of her smacking his goddam head in. He said die words over and over to himself and after a while he stopped laughing. He said them again but die laughing had gone out. He said diem again but it wouldn't start back up. All diat chasing for nothing, he diought again. He might as well go home. What did he want to be sitting around here for? He felt suddenly like he would if people had been laughing at him. Aw, go to hell, he told diem. He got up and kicked his foot sharply into somebody's leg and said, "Take that, sucker," and turned into the woods to take the short trail home.

And as soon as he got in die door, diey would holler, "How did you tear your clothes and where did you get that knot on your forehead?" He was going to say he fell in a hole. What difference would it make? Yeah, God, what difference would it make?

He almost stopped. He had never heard himself think that tone before. He wondered should he take die thought back. He guessed it was pretty bad; but heck, it was die way he felt. He couldn't help feeling diat way. Heck . .. hell, it was die way he felt. He guessed he couldn't help that. He walked on a little way, thinking, thinking about it. He wondered suddenly if he were going "bad." That's what Hane had done. Hane played pool and smoked cigarettes and sneaked in at twelve-thirty and boy he thought he was something. "There's nothing you can do about," their grandmodier had told their fadier, "he's at diat age." What age? Ruller wondered. I'm eleven, he diought. That's pretty young. Hane hadn't started until he was fifteen. I guess it's worse in me, he diought. He wondered would he fight it. Their grandmodier had talked to Hane and told him die only way to conquer die devil was to fight him—if he didn't, he couldn't be her boy any more—Ruller sat down on a stump—and she said she'd give him one more chance, did he want it? and he yelled at her, nol and would she leave him alone? and she told him, well, she loved him even if he didn't love her and he was her boy anyway and so was Ruller. Oh no, I ain't, Ruller diought quickly. Oh no. She's not pinning any of diat stuff on me.

Boy, he could shock die pants off her. He could make her teedi fall in her soup. He started giggling. The next time she asked him if he wanted to play a game of parcheesi, he'd say, hell no, goddammit, didn't she know any good games? Get out her goddam cards and he'd show her a few. He rolled over on the ground, choking with laughter. "Let's have some booze, kid," he'd say. "Let's get stinky." Boy, he'd knock her out of her socks I He sat on die ground, red and grinning to himself, bursting every now and tlien into a fresh spasm of giggles. He remembered die minister had said young men were going to die devil by the dozens this day and age; forsaking gentle ways; walking in die tracks of Satan.

They would rue die day, he said. There would be weeping and gnashing of teetli. "Weeping," Ruller muttered. Men didn't weep.

How do you gnash your teetli? he wondered. He grated his jaws together and made an ugly face. He did it several times.

He bet he could steal.

He thought about chasing the turkey for nodiing. It was a dirty trick. He bet he could be a jewel diief. They were smart. He bet he could have all Scotland Yard on his tail. Hell.

He got up. God could go around sticking tilings in your face and making you chase tliem all afternoon for notliing.

You shouldn't think that way about God, though.

But that was die way he felt. If diat was die way he felt, could he help it? He looked around quickly as if someone might be hiding in die bushes; dien suddenly he started.

It was rolled over at the edge of a diicket—a pile of ruffled bronze with a red head lying limp along the ground. Ruller stared at it, un able to diink; then he leaned forward suspiciously. He wasn't going to touch it. Why was it tliere now for him to take ? He wasn't going to touch it. It could just lie tliere. The picture of himself walking in the room with it slung over his shoulder came back to him. Look at Ruller widi tliat turkey I Lord, look at Ruller I He squatted down beside it and looked widiout touching it. He wondered what had been wrong witli its wing. He lifted it up by die tip and looked under. The feadiers were blood-soaked. It had been shot. It must weigh ten pounds, he figured.

Lord, Ruller I It's a huge turkey I He wondered how it would feel slung over his shoulder. Maybe, he considered, he was supposed to take it.

Ruller gets our turkeys for us. Ruller got it in die woods, chased it dead. Yes, he's a very unusual child.

Ruller wondered suddenly if he were an unusual child.

It came down on him in an instant: he was . . . an . . . unusual . . . child. He reckoned he was more unusual than Hane. He had to worry more than Hane because he knew more how

diings were.

Sometimes when he was listening at night, he heard tliem arguing like they were going to kill each other; and the next day his father would go out early and his mother would have the blue veins out on her forehead and look like she was

expecting a snake to jump from the ceiling any minute. He guessed he was one of the most unusual children ever. Maybe that was why die turkey was there. He rubbed his hand along the neck. Maybe it was to keep him from going bad. Maybe God wanted to keep him from that.

Maybe God had knocked it out right there where he'd see it when he got up.

Maybe God was in the bush now, waiting for him to make up his mind. Ruller blushed. He wondered if God could think he was a very unusual child. He must. He found himself suddenly blushing and grinning and he rubbed his hand over his face quick to make himself stop. If You want me to take it, he said, I'll be glad to. Maybe finding die turkey was a sign. Maybe God wanted him to be a preacher. He dbought of Bing Crosby and Spencer Tracy. He might found a place for boys to stay who were going bad. He lifted the turkey up—it was heavy all right—and fitted it over his shoulder. He wished he could see how he looked witli it slung over like tliat. It occurred to him that he might as well go home the long way— tlirough town. He had plenty of time. He started off slowly, shifting die turkey until it fit comfortably over his shoulder. He remembered the things he had tliought before he found the turkey. They were pretty bad, he guessed.

He guessed God had stopped him before it was too late. He should be very thankful. Thank You, he said.

Come on, boys, he said, we will take diis turkey back for our dinner. We certainly are much obliged to You, he said to God. This turkey weighs ten pounds. You were mighty generous.

That's okay, God said. And listen, we ought to have a talk about these boys. They're entirely in your hands, see? I'm leaving the job strictly up to you. I have confidence in you, McFarney.

You can trust me, Ruller said. I'll come through with the goods.

He went into town with the turkey over his shoulder. He wanted to do something for God but he didn't know what he could do. If anybody was playing the accordion on the street today, he'd give them his dime. He only had one dime, but he'd give it to them. Maybe he could think of something better, though. He had been going to keep the dime for something. He might could get another one from his grandmother. How about a goddam dime, kid? He pulled his mouth piously out of the grin. He wasn't going to think that way any more. He couldn't get a dime from her anyway. His mother was going to whip him if he asked his grandmother for money again. Maybe something would turn up that he could do. If God wanted him to do something, He'd turn something up.

He was getting into the business block and through the corner of his eye he

noticed people looking at him. There were eight thousand people in Mulrose County and on Saturday every one of them was in Tilford on the business block. They turned as Ruller passed and looked at him. He glanced at himself reflected in a store window, shifted the turkey slightly, and walked quickly ahead. He heard someone call, but he walked on, pretending he- was deaf. It was his mother's friend, Alice Gilhard, and if she wanted him, let her catch up with him.

"Ruller!" she cried. "My goodness, where did you get that turkey?"

She came up behind him fast and put her hand on his shoulder.

"That's some bird," she said. "You must be a good shot."

"I didn't shoot it," Ruller said coldly. "I captured it. I chased it dead."

"Heavens," she said. "You wouldn't capture me one sometime, would you?"

"I might if I ever have time," Ruller said. She thought she was so cute.

Two men came over and whistled at the turkey. They yelled at some other men on the corner to look. Another of his mother's friends stopped and some country boys who had been sitting on the curb got up and tried to see the turkey without showing they were interested. A man with a hunting suit and gun stopped and looked at Ruller and walked around behind him and looked at the turkey.

"How much do you think it weighs?" a lady asked.

"At least ten pounds," Ruller said.

"How long did you chase it?"

"About an hour," Ruller said.

"The goddam imp," the man in the hunting suit muttered.

"That's really amazing," a lady commented.

"About that long," Ruller said.

"You must be very tired."

"No," Ruller said. "I have to go. I'm in a hurry." He worked his face to look as if he were thinking something out and hurried down die street until he was out of their view. He felt warm all over and nice as if sometJiing very fine were going to be or had been. He looked back once and saw mat the country boys were following him. He hoped they would come up and ask to look

at the turkey. God must be wonderful, he felt suddenly. He wanted to do something for God. He hadn't seen anyone playing the accordion, though, or selling pencils and he was past die business block. He might see one before he really got to die streets where people lived at. If he did, he'd give away the dime —even while he knew he couldn't get another one any time soon. He began to wish he would see somebody begging.

Those country kids were still trailing along behind him. He thought he might stop and ask diem did diey want to see the turkey; but diey might just stare at him. They were tenants' children and sometimes tenants' children just stared at you. He might found a home for tenants' children. He thought about going back through town to see if he had passed a beggar widiout seeing him, but he decided people might think he was showing off with die turkey.

Lord, send rne a beggar, he prayed suddenly. Send me one before I get home. He had never diought before of praying on his own, but it was a good idea. God had put the turkey diere. He'd send him a beggar. He knew for a fact God would send him one. He was on Hill Street now and diere were nothing but houses on Hill Street. It would be strange to find a beggar here. The sidewalks were empty except for a few children and some tricycles. Ruller looked back; the country boys were still following him. He decided to slow down. It might make them catch up with him and it might give a beggar more time to get to him. If one were coming. He wondered if one were coming. If one came, it would mean God had gone out of His way to get one. It would mean God was really interested. He had a sudden fear one wouldn't come; it was a whole fear quick.

One will come, he told himself. God was interested in him because he was a very unusual child. He went on.. The streets were deserted now. He guessed one wouldn't come. Maybe God didn't have confidence in—no, God did. Lord, please send me a beggar I he implored. He squinched his face rigid and strained his muscles in a knot and said, "Please! one right now"; and the minute he said it — the minute—Hetty Gilman turned around the corner before him, heading straight to where he was.

He felt almost like he had when he ran into the tree.

She was walking down the street right toward him. It was just like tiie turkey lying there. It was just as if she had been hiding behind a house until he came by. She was an old woman whom everybody said had more money tiian anybody in town because she had been begging for twenty years. She sneaked into people's houses and sat until they gave her something. If they didn't, she cursed them. Nevertheless, she was a beggar. Ruller walked faster. He took the dime out of his pocket so it would be ready. His heart was stomping up and down in his chest. He made a noise to see if he could talk. As they neared each other, he stuck out

his hand. "Here!" he shouted. "Here!"

She was a tall, long-faced old woman in an antique black cloak. Her face was the color of a dead chicken's skin. When she saw him, she looked as if she suddenly smelled something bad. He darted at her and thrust the dime into her hand and dashed on without looking back.

Slowly his heart calmed and he began to feel full of a new feeling—like being happy and embarrassed at tlie same time. Maybe, he thought, blushing, he would give all his money to her. He felt as if the ground did not need to be under him any longer. He noticed suddenly that die country boys' feet were shuffling just be hind him, and almost without thinking, he turned and asked graciously, "You all wanta see this turkey?"

They stopped where they were and stared at him. One in front spit. Ruller looked down at it quickly. There was real tobacco juice in itl "Wheered you git that turkey?" the spitter asked.

"I found it in the woods," Ruller said. "I chased it dead. See, it's been shot under the wing." He took the turkey oft his shoulder and held it down where they could see. "I think it was shot twice," he went on excitedly, pulling the wing up.

"Lemme see it here," the spitter said.

Ruller handed him the turkey. "You see down there where the bullet hole is?" he asked. "Well, I think it was shot twice in the same hole, I think it was. ... " The turkey's head flew in his face as the spitter slung it up in the air and over his own shoulder and turned. The others turned with him and together they sauntered off in the direction they had come, the turkey sticking stiff out on the spitter's back and its head swinging slowly in a circle as he walked away.

They were in the next block before Ruller moved. Finally, he realized that he could not even see them any longer, they were so far away. He turned toward home, almost creeping. He walked four blocks and then suddenly, noticing that it was dark, he began to run. He ran faster and faster, and as he turned up the road to his house, his heart was running as fast as his legs and he was certain that Something Awful was tearing behind him with its arms rigid and its fingers ready to clutch.

The Train

THINKING about the porter, he had almost forgotten the berth. He had an upper one. The man in the station had said he could give him a lower and Haze had asked didn't he have no upper ones; the man said sure if that was what he wanted, and gave him an upper one. Leaning back on the seat, Haze had seen how the ceiling was rounded over him. It was in there. They pulled the ceiling down and it was in there, and you climbed up to it on a ladder. He hadn't seen any ladders around; he reckoned they kept them in the closet. The closet was up where you came in. When he first got on the train, he had seen the porter standing in front of the closet, putting on his porter's jacket. Haze had stopped right then—right where he was. The turn of his head was like and the back of his neck was like and the short reach of his arm. He turned away from die closet and looked at Haze and Haze saw his eyes and they were like; they were the same—same as old Cash's for the first instant, and then different. They turned different while he was looking at them; hardened flat. "Whu . . . what time do you pull down the beds?" Haze mumbled. "Long time yet," the porter said, reaching into the closet again. Haze didn't know what else to say to him. He went on to his section. Now die train was greyflying past instants of trees and quick spaces of field and a motionless sky mat sped darkening away in the opposite direction. Haze leaned his head back on the seat and looked out the window, the yellow light of die train lukewarm on him. The porter had passed twice, twice back and twice forward, and the second time forward he had looked sharply at Haze for an instant and passed on without saying anything; Haze had turned and stared after him as he had done the time before. Even his walk was like. All them gulch niggers resembled. They looked like their own kind of nigger—heavy and bald, rock all through. Old Cash in his day had been two hundred pounds heavy—no fat on him—and five feet high with not more than two inches over. Haze wanted to talk to the porter. What would die porter say when he told him: I'm from Eastrod? What would he say?

The train had come to Evansville. A lady got on and sat opposite Haze. That meant she would have the berth under him. She said she diought it was going to snow. She said her husband had driven her down to the station and he said if it didn't snow before he got home, he'd be surprised. He had ten miles to go; diey lived in the suburbs. She was going to Florida to visit her daughter. She had never had time to take a trip that far off. The way things happened, one thing right after anodier, it seemed like time went by so fast you couldn't tell if you were old or young. She looked as if it had been cheating her, going double quick

when she was asleep and couldn't watch it. Haze was glad to have someone there talking.

He remembered when he was a little boy, him and his modier and die odier children would go into Chattanooga on the Tennessee Railroad. His modier had always started up a conversation with the odier people on die train. She was like an old bird dog just unpenned diat raced, sniffing up every rock and suck and sucking in die air around everydiing she stopped at. There wasn't a person she hadn't spoken to by die time they were ready to get off. She remembered diem too. Long years after, she would say she wondered where the lady was who was going to Fort West, or she wondered if die man who was selling Bibles had ever got his wife out die hospital. She had a hankering for people—as if what happened to die ones she talked to happened to her dien. She was a Jackson. Annie Lou Jackson.

My modier was a Jackson, Haze said to himself. He had stopped listening to die lady aldiough he was still looking at her and she diought he was listening. My name is Hazel Wickers, he said. I'm nineteen. My mother was a Jackson. I was raised in Eastrod, East-rod, Tennessee; he diought about the porter again. He was going to ask the porter. It struck him suddenly that the porter might even be Cash's son. Cash had a son run away. It happened before Haze's time. Even so, the porter would know Eastrod.

Haze glanced out the window at the shapes black-spinning past him. He could shut his eyes and make Eastrod at night out of any of them—he could find the two houses with the road between and the store and the nigger houses and the one barn and the piece of fence that started off into the pasture, gray-white when the moon was on it. He could put the mule face, solid, over the fence and let it hang there, feeling how the night was. He felt it himself. He felt it light-touching around him. He seen his ma coming up the path, wiping her hands on an apron she had taken off, looking like the night change was on her, and then standing in the doorway: Haaazzzzeeeee, Haazzzeee, come in here. The train said it for him. He wanted to get up and go find the porter.

"Are you going home?" Mrs. Hosen asked him. Her name was Mrs. Wallace Ben Hosen; she had been a Miss Hitchcock before she married.

"Oh!" Haze said, startled—"I get off at, I get off at Taulkinham."

Mrs. Hosen knew some people in Evansville who had a cousin in Taulkinham—a Mr. Henrys, she thought. Being from Taulkinham, Haze might know him. Had he ever heard the. . . .

"Taulkinham ain't where I'm from," Haze muttered. "I don't know nothin' about Taulkinham." He didn't look at Mrs. Hosen. He knew what she was going to ask next and he felt it coming and it came, "Well, where do you live?"

He wanted to get away from her. "It was there," he mumbled, squirming in the seat. Then he said, "I don't rightly know, I was there but . . . this is just the third time I been at Taulkinham," he said quickly—her face had crawled out and was staring at him—"I ain't been since I went when I was six. I don't know nothin' about it. Once I seen a circus there but not. . . ." He heard a clanking at the end of the car and looked to see where it was coming from. The porter was pulling the walls of the sections farther out. "I got to see the porter a minute," he said and escaped down the aisle. He didn't know what he'd say to the porter. He got to him and he still didn't know what he'd say. "I reckon you're fixing to make them up now," he said.

"That's right," the porter said.

"How long does it take you to make one up?" Haze asked.

"Seven minutes," the porter said.

"I'm from Eastrod," Haze said. "I'm from Eastrod, Tennessee."

"That isn't on this line," the porter said. "You on the wrong train if you counting on going to any such place as that." "I'm going to Taulkinham," Haze said. "I was raised in Eastrod." "You want your berth made up now?" the porter asked. "Huh?" Haze said. "Eastrod, Tennessee; ain't you ever heard of Eastrod?"

The porter wrenched one side of the seat flat. "I'm from Chicago," he said. He jerked the shades down on either window and wrenched the other seat down. Even the back of his neck was like. When he bent over, it came out in three bulges. He was from Chicago. "You standing in the middle of die aisle. Somebody gonna want to get past you," he said, suddenly turning on Haze.

"I reckon I'll go sit down some," Haze said, blushing.

He knew people were staring at him as he went back to his section. Mrs. Hosen was looking out the window. She turned and eyed him suspiciously; then she said it hadn't snowed yet, had it? and relaxed into a stream of talk. She guessed her husband was getting his own supper tonight. She was paying a girl to come cook his dinner but he was having to get his own supper. She didn't diink diat hurt a man once in a while. She thought it did him good. Wallace wasn't lazy but he didn't think what it took to keep going with housework all day. She didn't know how it would feel to be in Florida with somebody waiting on her.

He was from Chicago.

This was her first vacation in five years. Five years ago she had gone to visit

her sister in Grand Rapids. Time flies. Her sister had left Grand Rapids and moved to Waterloo. She didn't suppose she'd recognize her sister's children if she saw tJiem now. Her sister wrote diey were as big as dieir father. Things changed fast, she said. Her sister's husband had worked with the city water supply in Grand Rapids—he had a good place—but in Waterloo, he. . . .

"I went back tiiere last time," Haze said. "I wouldn't be getting off at Taulkinham if it was there; it went apart like, you know, it "

Mrs. Hosen frowned. "You must be thinking of another Grand Rapids," she said. "The Grand Rapids I'm talking about is a large city and it's always where it's always been." She stared at him for a moment and then went on: when they were in Grand Rapids they got along fine, but in Waterloo he suddenly took to liquor. Her sister had to support the house and educate the children. It beat Mrs. Hosen how he could sit there year after year.

Haze's mother had never talked much on die train; she mostly listened. She was a Jackson. After a while Mrs. Hosen said she was hungry and asked him if he wanted to go into the diner. He did.

The dining car was full and people were waiting to get in it. Haze and Mrs. Hosen stood in line for a half hour, rocking in the narrow passageway and every few minutes flattening themselves against the side to let a trickle of people dirough. Mrs. Hosen began talking to the lady on the side of her. Haze stared stupidly at die wall. He would never have had the courage to come to the diner by himself; it was fine he had met Mrs. Hosen. If she hadn't been talking, he would have told her intelligently that he had gone diere the last time and that the porter was not from there but that he looked near enough like a gulch nigger to be one, near enough like old Cash to be his child. He'd tell her while diey were eating. He couldn't see inside the diner from where he was; he wondered what it would be like in there. Like a restaurant, he reckoned. He thought of the berth. By die time diey got through eating, the berth would probably be made up and he could get in it. What would his ma say if she seen him having a berdi in a train! He bet she never reckoned diat would happen. As they got nearer die entrance to the diner he could see in. It was like a city restaurant! He bet she never reckoned it was like that.

The head man was beckoning to die people at die first of the line every time someone left—sometimes for one person, sometimes for more. He motioned for two people and die line moved up so that Haze and Mrs. Hosen and die lady she was talking to were standing at the end of the diner, looking in. In a minute, two more people left. The man beckoned and Mrs. Hosen and die lady walked in, and Haze followed them. The man stopped

Haze and said, "Only two," and pushed him back to the doorway. Haze's face went an ugly red. He tried to get behind the next person and then he tried to get through the line to go back to the car he had come from, but there were too many people bunched in the opening. He had to stand there while everyone around looked at him. No one left for a while and he had to stand there. Mrs. Hosen did not look at him again. Finally a lady up at the far end got up and the head man jerked his hand and Haze hesitated and saw the hand jerk again and then lurched up the aisle, falling against two tables on the way and getting his hand wet with somebody's coffee. He didn't look at the people he sat down with. He ordered the first thing on the menu and, when it came, ate it without thinking what it might be. The people he was sitting with had finished and, he could tell, were waiting, watching him eat.

When he got out the diner he was weak and his hands were making small jittery movements by themselves. It seemed a year ago that he had seen the head man beckon to him to sit down. He stopped between two cars and breathed in the cold air to clear his head. It helped. When he got back to his car all the berths were made up and the aisles were dark and sinister, hung in heavy green. He realized again that he had a berth, an upper one, and that he could get in it now. He could lie down and raise the shade just enough to look out from and watch— what he had planned to do— and see how everything went by a train at night. He could look right into the night, moving.

He got his sack and went to the men's room and put on his night clothes. A sign said to get the porter to let you into the upper berths. The porter might be a cousin of some of them gulch niggers, he thought suddenly; he might ask him if he had any cousins around Eastrod, or maybe just in Tennessee. He went down the aisle, looking for him. They might have a little conversation before he got in the berth. The porter was not at that end of the car and he went back to look at the other end. Going around the corner, he ran into something heavily pink; it gasped and muttered, "Clumsy!" It was Mrs. Hosen in a pink wrapper with her hair in knots around her head. He had forgotten about her. She was terrifying with her hair slicked back and the knobs like dark toad stools framing her face. She tried to get past him and he tried to let her but tiiey were both moving the same way each time. Her face became purplish except for little white marks over it that didn't heat up. She drew herself stiff and stopped still and said, "What IS the matter with you?" He slipped past her and dashed down the aisle and ran suddenly into the porter so that the porter slipped and he fell on top of him and the porter's face was right under his and it was old Cash Simmons. For a minute he couldn't move off the porter for thinking it was Cash

and he breathed, "Cash," and the porter pushed him off and got up and went down die aisle quick and Haze scrambled off the floor and went after him saying he wanted to get in the berth and thinking, this is Cash's kin, and dien suddenly, like something thrown at him when he wasn't looking: this is Cash's son run away; and then: he knows about Eastrod and doesn't want it, he doesn't want to talk about it, he doesn't want to talk about Cash.

He stood staring while the porter put the ladder up to the berth and then he started up it, still looking at die porter, seeing Cash there, only different, not in the eyes, and halfway up the ladder he said, still looking at the porter, "Cash is dead. He got the cholera from a pig." The porter's mouth perked down and he muttered, looking at Haze with his eyes thin, "I'm from Chicago. My father was a railroad man." And Haze stared at him and then laughed: a nigger being a railroad "man": and laughed again, and the porter jerked the ladder off suddenly with a wrench of his arm that sent Haze clutching at the blanket into the- berdi.

He lay on his stomach in the berth, trembling from the way he had got in. Cash's son. From Eastrod. But not wanting Eastrod; hating it. He lay there for a while on his stomach, not moving. It seemed a year since he had fallen over the porter in the aisle.

After a while he remembered that he was actually in die berth and he turned and found die light and looked around him. There was no window.

The side wall did not have a window in it. It didn't push up to be a window. There was no window concealed in it. There was a fish-net thing stretched across the side wall; but no windows. For a second it flashed through his mind that the porter had done this— given him this berth diat diere were no windows to and had just a fish net strung the length of—because he hated him. But they must all be like this.

The top of die berdi was low and curved over. He lay down. The curved top looked like it was not quite closed; it looked like it was closing. He lay diere for a while not moving. There was somediing in his throat like a sponge widi an egg taste. He had eggs for supper. They were in die sponge in his throat. They were right in his throat. He didn't want to turn over for fear diey would move; he wanted the light off; he wanted it dark. He reached up widiout turning and felt for the button and snapped it and the darkness sank down on him and dien faded a little with light from die aisle diat came in tlirough the foot of space not closed. He wanted it all dark, he didn't want it diluted. He heard die porter's footsteps coming down die aisle, soft into tiie rug, coming steadily down, brushing against the green curtains and fading up die odier way out of hearing. He was from

Eastrod. From Eastrod but he hated it. Cash wouldn't have put any claim on him. He wouldn't have wanted him. He wouldn't have wanted anydiing diat wore a monkey white coat and toted a whisk broom in his pocket. Cash's clodies had looked like diey'd set a while under a rock; and they smelled like nigger. He diought how Cash smelled, but he smelled die train. No more gulch niggers in Eastrod. In Eastrod. Turning in the road, he saw in the dark, half dark, die store boarded and die

A>arn open widi die dark free in it, and die smaller house half carted away, die porch gone and no floor in die hall. He had been supposed to go to his sister's in Taulkinham on his last furlough when he came up from die camp in Georgia but he didn't want to go to Taulkinham and he had gone back to Eastrod even though he knew how it was: die two families scattered in towns and even die niggers from up and down die road gone into Memphis and Murfreesboro and odier places. He had gone back and slept in die house on die floor in die kitchen and a board had fallen on his head out of die roof and cut his face. He jumped, feeling die board, and die train jolted and unjolted and went again. He went looking dirough the house to see diey hadn't left notiiing in it ought to been taken.

His ma always slept in the kitchen and had her walnut shifferrobe in there. Wasn't another shifferrobe nowhere around. She was a Jackson. She had paid thirty dollars for it and hadn't bought herself nothing else big again. And they had left it. He reckoned they hadn't had room on the truck for it. He opened all the drawers. There were two lengths of wrapping cord in the top one and nodiing in die odiers. He was surprised nobody had come and stolen a shifferrobe like that. He took die wrapping cord and tied the legs dirough the floorboards and left a piece of paper in each of die drawers: THIS SHIFFERROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL WICKERS, DO NOT **STEAL IT OR YOU WILL BE HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED.**

She could rest easier knowing it was guarded some. If she come looking any time at night, she would see. He wondered if she walked at night and came there ever—came widi that look on her face, unrested and looking, going up the path and through the barn open all around and stopping in the shadow by the store boarded up, coming on unrested widi that look on her face like he had seen through the crack going down. He seen her face through the crack when they were shutting the top on her, seen the shadow that came down over her face and pulled her mouth down like she wasn't satisfied with resting, like she was going to spring up and shove the lid back and fly out like a spirit going to be satisfied: but they shut it on down. She might have been going to fly out of there, she might have been going to spring—he saw her terrible like a huge bat darting from the closing—fly out of diere but it was falling dark on top of her, closing

dowrr all the time, closing down; from inside he saw it closing, coming closer, closer down and cutting off the light and die room and die trees seen through die window

dirough the crack faster and darker closing down. He opened his eyes and saw it closing down and he sprang up between the crack and wedged his body through it and hung there moving, dizzy, widi die dim light of the train slowly showing the rug below, moving, dizzy. He hung there wet and cold and saw the porter at the other end of die car, a white shape in die darkness, standing there, watching him and not moving. The tracks curved and he fell back sick into the rushing stillness of die train.

The Peeler

HAZEL MOTES walked along downtown, close to the store fronts but not looking at them. His neck was thrust forward as if he were trying to smell something that was always being drawn away. He had on a blue suit that was glare-blue in die day time, but looked purplish with the night lights on it, and his hat was a fierce black wool hat like a preacher's hat. The stores in Taulkinham stayed open on Thursday nights and a lot of people were shopping. Haze's shadow was now behind him and now before him and now and dien broken up by other people's shadows, but when it was by itself, stretching behind him, it was a thin nervous shadow walking backwards. After a while he stopped where a lean-faced man had a card table set up in front of a Lerner's Dress Shop and was demonstrating a potato peeler. The man had on a small canvas hat and a shirt patterned with bunches of upsidedown pheasants and quail and bronze turkeys. He was pitching his voice under the street noises so that it reached every ear distinctly as in a private conversation. A few people gathered around. There were two buckets on die card table, one empty and die odier full of potatoes. Between die two buckets diere was a pyramid of green cardboard boxes and on top of tiie stack, one peeler was open for demonstration. The man stood in front of this altar, pointing over it at different people. "How about you?" he said, pointing at a damp-haired pimpled boy, "you ain't gonna let one of these go by?" He stuck a brown potato in one side of die open machine. The machine was a square tin box witii a red handle, and as he turned the handle, the potato went into die box and tiien in a second, backed out die otiier side, white. "You ain't gonna let one of diese go by!" he said.

The boy guffawed and looked at the other people gathered around. He had yellow slick hair and a fox-shaped face.

"What's yer name?" tiie peeler man asked.

"Name Enoch Emery," the boy said and snuffled.

"Boy with a pretty name like that ought to have one of these," the man said, rolling his eyes, trying to warm up the others. Nobody laughed but the boy. Then a man standing across from Hazel Motes laughed. He was a tall man with light green glasses and a black suit and a black wool hat like a preacher's hat, and he was leaning on a white cane. The laugh sounded as if it came from somediing tied up in a croker sack. It was evident he was a blind man. He had his hand on die shoulder of a big-boned child with a black knitted cap pulled down low on her forehead and a fringe of orange hair sticking out

from it on either side. She had a long face and a short sharp nose. The people began to look at the two of them instead of the man selling peelers. This irritated the man selling peelers. "How about you, you there," he said, pointing at Hazel Motes. "You'll never be able to get a bargain like this in any store."

"HeyI" Enoch Emery said, reaching across a woman and punching Haze's arm. "He's talking to youl He's talking to you!" Haze was looking at the blind man and the child. Enoch Emery had to punch him again.

"Whyn't you take one of these home to yer wife?" the peeler man was saying. "I ain't none," Haze muttered without drawing his attention from the blind man.

"Well, you got a dear old mother, ain't you?"

"XT »»

No.

"Well shaw," the man said, with his hand cupped to the people, "he needs one theseyer just to keep him company."

Enoch Emery thought that was so funny that he leaned over and slapped his knee, but Hazel Motes didn't look as if he had heard it yet. "I'm going to give away half a dozen peeled potatoes to the first person purchasing one theseyer machines," the man said. "Who's gonna step up first ? Only a dollar and a half for a machine'd cost you tiiree dollars in any store I" Enoch Emery began fumbling in his pockets. "You'll thank the day you ever stopped here," the man said, "you'll never forget it. Ever one of you people purchasing one theseyer machines'll never forget it."

The blind man began to move straight forward suddenly and the peeler man got ready to hand him one of the green boxes, but he went past the card table and turned, moving at a right angle back in among the people. He was handing something out. Then Haze saw that the child was moving around too, giving out white leaflets. There were not many people gathered there, but the ones who were began to move off. When the machine-seller saw this, he leaned, glaring, over the card table. "Hey you!" he yelled at the blind man, "what you think you doing? Who you think you are, running people off from here?"

The blind man didn't pay him any mind. He kept on handing out the pamphlets. He handed one at Enoch Emery and then he came toward Haze, hitting the white cane at an angle from his leg.

"What the hell you think you doing?" the man selling peelers yelled. "I got these people together, how you think you can horn in?"

The blind man had a peculiar boiled looking red face. He thrust one of the pamphlets a little to the side of Haze and Haze grabbed it. It was a tract. The words on the outside of it said, "Jesus Calls You."

"I'd like to know who the hell you think you are!" the man with the peelers was yelling. The child passed the card table again and handed him a tract. He looked at it for an instant with his lip curled, and then he charged around the card table, upsetting the bucket of potatoes. "These damn Jesus fanatics," he yelled, glaring around, trying to find the blind man. More people had gathered, hoping to see a disturbance, and the blind man had disappeared among them. "These goddam Communist Jesus Foreigners!" the peeler man screamed. "I got this crowd together!" He stopped, realizing there was a crowd.

"Listen folks," he said, "one at a time, there's plenty to go around, just don't push, a half dozen peeled potatoes to the first person stepping up to buy." He got back behind the card table quietly and started holding up the peeler boxes. "Step on up, plenty to go around," he said, "no need to crowd."

Hazel Motes didn't open his tract. He looked at the outside of it and then he tore it across. He put die two pieces together and tore them across again. He kept restacking the pieces and tearing diem again undl he had a little handful of confetti. He turned his hand over and let the shredded leaflet sprinkle to the ground. Then he looked up and saw die blind man's child not three feet away, watching him. Her mouth was open and her eyes glittered on him like two chips of green bottle glass. She had on a black dress and there was a white gunny sack hung over her shoulder. Haze scowled and began rubbing his sticky hands on his pants.

"I seen you," she said. Then she moved quickly over to where the blind man was standing now, beside the card table. Most of the people had moved off.

The peeler man leaned over die card table and said, "HeyI" to the blind man. "I reckon that showed you. Trying to horn in." But the blind man stood there witli his chin tilted back slightly as if he saw something over their heads.

"Lookerhere," Enoch Emery said, "I ain't got but a dollar six teen cent but I. . . ."

"Yah," die man said, as if he were going to make die blind man see him, "I reckon diat'll show you you can't muscle in on me. Sold eight peelers, sold. . . ."

"Give me one of them," die child said, poindng to the peelers.

"Hanh?" he said.

She reached in her pocket and drew out a long coin purse and opened it. "Give me one of them," she said, holding out two fifty cent pieces.

The man eyed die money widi his moudi hiked on one side. "A buck fifty, sister," he said.

She pulled her hand in quickly and all at once glared around

at Hazel Motes as if he had made a noise at her. The blind man was moving off. She stood a second glaring red-faced at Haze and then she turned and followed die blind man. Haze started suddenly.

"Listen," Enoch Emery said, "I ain't got but a dollar sixteen cent and I want me one of diem. . . ."

"You can keep it," die man said, taking die bucket off die card table. "This ain't no cut-rate joint."

Hazel Motes stood staring after the blind man, jerking his hands in and out of his pockets. He looked as if he were trying to move forward and backward at the same time. Then suddenly he thrust two bills at die man selling peelers and snatched a box off die card table and started down the street. In just n second Enoch Emery was panting at his elbow.

"My, I reckon you got a heap of money," Enoch Emery said. Haze turned the corner and saw them about a block ahead of him. Then he slowed down some and saw Enoch Emery there. Enoch had on a yellowish white suit with a pinkish white shirt and his tie was a greenpeaish color. He was grinning. He looked like a friendly hound dog with light mange. "How long you been here?" he inquired.

"Two days," Haze muttered.

"I been here two months," Enoch said. "I work for the city. Where you work?" "Not working," Haze said. "That's too bad," Enoch said. "I work for the city." He skipped

a step to get in line with Haze, then he said, "I'm eighteen year old and I ain't been here but two months and I already work for die city."

"That's fine," Haze said. He pulled his hat down farther on the side Enoch Emery was on and walked faster.

"I didn't ketch your name good," Enoch said.

Haze said his name.

"You look like you might be follering them hicks," Enoch remarked. "You go in for a lot of Jesus?" "No," Haze said. "No, me neither, not much," Enoch agreed. "I went to thisyer

Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy for four weeks. Thisyer woman that traded me from my daddy she sent me; she was a Welfare woman. Jesus, four weeks and I thought I was gonna be sanctified crazy."

Haze walked to the end of die block and Enoch stayed all the time at his elbow, panting and talking. When Haze started across die street, Enoch yelled, "Don't you see dieter light! That means you got to wait!" A cop blew a whistle and a car blasted its horn and stopped short. Haze went on across, keeping his eyes on the blind man in the middle of the block. The policeman kept blowing

the whistle. He crossed the street over to where Haze was and stopped him. He had a thin face and oval-shaped yellow eyes.

"You know what that little thing hanging up diere is for?" he asked, pointing to the traffic light over the intersection.

"I didn't see it," Haze said.

The policeman looked at him without saying anything. A few people stopped. He rolled his eyes at them. "Maybe you thought the red ones was for white folks and the green ones for colored," he said.

"Yeah, I thought that," Haze said. "Take your hand off me."

The policeman took his hand off and put it on his hip. He backed one step away and said, "You tell all your friends about these lights. Red is to stop, green is to go—men and women, white folks and niggers, all go on the same light. You tell all your friends so when they come to town, they'll know." The people laughed.

"I'll look after him," Enoch Emery said, pushing in by the police man. "He ain't been here but only two days. I'll look after him."

"How long you been here?" the cop asked.

"I was born and raised here," Enoch said. "This is my ole home town. I'll take care of him for you. Hey wait!" he yelled at Haze. "Wait on me!" He pushed out the crowd and caught up with him. "I reckon I saved you that time," he said.

"I'm obliged," Haze said.

"It wasn't nothing," Enoch said. "Why don't we go in Walgreen's and get us a soda? Ain't no nightclubs open this early."

"I don't like no drugstores," Haze said. "Goodby."

"That's all right," Enoch said. "I reckon I'll go along and keep you company for a while." He looked up ahead at the couple and said, "I sho wouldn't want to get messed up widi no hicks this time of night, particularly the Jesus kind. I done had enough of them myself. Thisyer woman that traded me from my daddy didn't do nothing but pray. Me and daddy, we moved around widi a sawmill where we worked and it set up outside Boonville one summer and here come thisyer woman." He caught hold of Haze's coat. "Only objection I got to Taulkinham is there's too many people on the street," he said confidentially, "look like they ain't satisfied until they knock you down—well, here she come and I reckon she took a fancy to me. I was twelve year old and I could sing some hymns good I learnt off a nigger. So here she comes taking a fancy to me and traded me off my daddy and took me to Boonville to live with her. She had a brick house but it was Jesus all

day long." While he was talking he was looking up at Haze, studying his face. All of a sudden he bumped into a little man lost in a pair of faded overalls. "Whyn't you look where you going?" he growled.

The little man stopped short and raised his arm in a vicious gesture and a mean dog look came on his face. "Who you tellin what?" he snarled.

"You see," Enoch said, jumping to catch up with Haze, "all they want to do is knock you down. I ain't never been to such a unfriendly place before. Even with that woman. I stayed with her for two months in that house of hers," he went on, "and then come fall she sent me to the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy and I thought that sho was gonna be some relief. This woman was hard to get along with—she wasn't old, I reckon she was forty year old—but she sho was ugly. She had theseyer brown glasses and her hair was so thin it looked like ham gravy trickling over her skull. I thought it was gonna be some certain relief to get to that Academy. I had run away oncet on her and she got me back and come to find out she had papers on me and she could send me to the penitentiary if I didn't stay with her so I sho was glad to get to theter Academy. You ever been to a academy?"

Haze didn't seem to hear the question. He still had his eye on the blind man in the next block.

"Well, it won't no relief," Enoch said. "Good Jesus, it won't no relief. I run away from there after four weeks and durn if she didn't get me back and brought me to that house of hers again. I got out though." He waited a minute. "You want to know how?"

After a second he said, "I scared hell out of that woman, that's how. I studied on it and studied on it. I even prayed. I said, 'Jesus, show me the way to get out of here without killing thisyer woman and getting sent to the penitentiary.' And durn if

He didn't. I got up one morning at just daylight and I went in her room without my pants on and pulled the sheet off her and giver a heart attackt. Then I went back to my daddy and we ain't seen hide of her since.

"Your jaw just crawls," he observed, watching the side of Haze's face. "You don't never laugh. I wouldn't be surprised if you wasn't a real wealthy man."

Haze turned down a side street. The blind man and the girl were on the corner a block ahead.

"Well, I reckon we gonna ketch up with em after all," Enoch said. "Ain't that girl ugly, though? You seen them shoes she has on? Men's shoes, looks like. You know many people here?"

"No," Haze said.

"You ain't gonna know none neither. This is one more hard place to make friends in. I been here two months and I don't know nobody, look like all they want to do is knock you down. I reckon you got a right heap of money," he said. "I ain't got none. Had, I'd sho know what to do with it." The man and the girl stopped on the corner and turned up the left side of the street. "We catching up," he said. "I bet we'll be at some meeting singing hymns widi her and her daddy if we don't watch out."

Up in die next block there was a large building widi columns and a dome. The blind man and the child were going toward it. There was a car parked in every space around the building and on die other side the street and up and down die streets near it. "That ain't no picture show," Enoch said. The blind man and die girl turned up the steps to the building. The steps went all die way across the front, and on either side there were stone lions sitting on pedestals. "Ain't no church," Enoch said. Haze stopped at die steps. He looked as if he were trying to settle his face into an expression. He pulled the black hat forward at a nasty angle and started toward the two, who had sat down in the corner by one of die lions. As they came nearer the blind man leaned forward as if he were listening to the footsteps, then he stood up, holding a tract out in his hand.

"Sit down," the child said in a loud voice. "It ain't nobody but them two boys."

"Nobody but us," Enoch Emery said. "Me and him been follerin you all about a mile."

"I knew somebody was following me," the blind man said. "Sit down."

"They ain't here for nothing but to make fun," the child said. She looked as if she smelled something bad. The blind man was feeling out to touch them. Haze stood just out of reach of his hands, squinting at him as if he were trying to see the empty eye sockets under the green glasses.

"It ain't me, it's him," Enoch said. "He's been running after yawl ever since back yonder by them potato peelers. We bought one of em.

"I knew somebody was following me!" the blind man said. "I felt it all the way back yonder."

"I ain't followed you," Haze said. He felt the peeler box in his hand and looked at the girl. The black knitted cap came down almost to her eyes. She looked as if she might be thirteen or fourteen years old. "I ain't followed you nowhere," he said sourly. "I followed her." He stuck the peeler box out at her.

She jumped back and looked as if she were going to swallow her face. "I don't want that thing," she said. "What you think I want with that thing? Take it. It ain't mine. I don't want it!"

"I take it with tlianks for her," the blind man said. "Put it in your sack," he said to her.

Haze thrust the peeler at her again, but he was still looking at the blind man.

"I won't have it," she muttered.

"Take it like I told you," the blind man said shortly.

After a second she took it and shoved it in the sack where the tracts were. "It ain't mine," she said. "I don't want none of it. I got it but it ain't mine."

"She thanks you for it," the blind man said. "I knew some body was following me."

"I ain't followed you nowhere," Haze said. "I followed her to say I ain't beholden for none of her fast eye like she gave me back yonder." He didn't look at her, he looked at the blind man.

"What do you mean?" she shouted. "I never gave you no fast eye. I only watch you tearing up that tract. He tore it up in little pieces," she said, pushing the blind man's shoulder. "He tore it up and sprinkled it over the ground like salt and wiped his hands on his pants."

"He followed me," the blind man said. "Wouldn't anybody follow you. I can hear the urge for Jesus in his voice."

"Jesus," Haze muttered, "my Jesus." He sat down by die girl's leg. His head was at her knee and he set his hand on die step next to her foot. She had on men's shoes and black cotton stockings. The shoes were laced up tight and tied in precise bows. She moved herself away roughly and sat down behind die blind man.

"Listen at his cursing," she said in a low tone. "He never followed you."

"Listen," the blind man said, "you can't run away from Jesus. Jesus is a fact. If who you're looking for is Jesus, the sound of it will be in your voice."

"I don't hear nothing in his voice," Enoch Emery said. "I know a whole heap about Jesus because I attended thisyer Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy diat a woman sent me to. If it was anydiing about Jesus in his voice I could certainly hear it." He had got up onto die lion's back and he was sitting there sideways cross-legged.

The blind man reached out again and his hands suddenly cov ered Haze's face. For a second Haze didn't move or make any sound. Then he knocked die hands off. "Quit it," he said in a faint

voice. "You don't know nodiing about me."

"You got a secret need," die blind man said. "Them diat know Jesus once can't escape Him in the end."

"I ain't never known Him," Haze said.

"You got a least knowledge," die blind man said. "That's enough. You know His name and you're marked. If Jesus has marked you there ain't nodiing you can do about it. Them diat have knowledge can't swap it for ignorance." He was leaning forward but in die wrong direction so diat he appeared to be talking to die step below Haze's foot. Haze sat leaning backward widi die black hat dlted forward over his face.

"My daddy looks just like Jesus," Enoch said from die lion's back. "His hair hangs to his shoulders. Only difference is he's got a scar acrost his chin. I ain't never seen who my modier is."

"You're marked with knowledge," die blind man said. "You know what sin is and only them that know what it is can commit it. I knew all die time we were walking here somebody was following me," he said. "You couldn't have followed her. Wouldn't anybody follow her. I could feel diere was somebody near with an urge for Jesus."

"There ain't nodiing for your pain but Jesus," the girl said suddenly. She leaned forward and stuck her arm out witii her finger pointed at Haze's shoulder, but he spat down the steps and didn't look at her. "Listen," she said in a louder voice, "this here man and woman killed this little baby. It was her own child but it was ugly and she never give it any love. This child had Jesus and this woman didn't have nodiing but good looks and a man she was living in Sin widi. She sent the child away and it come back and she sent it away again and it come back again and ever time she sent it away it come back to where her and this man was living in Sin. They strangled it widi a silk stocking and hung it up in die chimney. It didn't give her any peace after that, though. Everydiing she looked at was diat child. Jesus made it beautiful to haunt her. She couldn't lie widi that man without she saw it, staring through die chimney at her, shining through the brick in die middle of die night." She moved her feet around so diat just the tips of diem stuck out from her skirt which she had pulled tight around her legs. "She didn't have nodiing but good looks," she said in a loud fast voice. "That ain't enough. No sirree."

"My Jesus," Haze said.

"It ain't enough," she repeated.

"I hear diem scraping dieir feet inside there," the blind man said. "Get out die tracts, diey're fixing to come out." "What we gonna do?" Enoch asked. "What's

inside theter building?"

"A program letting out," the blind man said. The child took the tracts out die gunny sack and gave him two bunches of diem, tied widi a string. "You and Enoch Emery go over on diat side and give out," he said to her. "Me and diis boy'll stay over here."

"He don't have no business touching diem," she said. "He don't want to do nodiing but shred diem up." "Go like I told you," die blind man said.

She stood there a second, scowling. Then she said, "You come on if you're coming," to Enoch Emery and Enoch jumped off the lion and followed her over to the other side.

The blind man was reaching forward. Haze ducked to the side but the blind man was next to him on die step with his hand clamped around his arm. He leaned forward so that he 'was facing Haze's knee and he said in a fast whisper, "You followed me here because you're in Sin but you can be a testament to the Lord. Repent! Go to the head of the stairs and renounce your sins and distribute these tracts to the people," and he thrust the stack of pamphlets into Haze's hand.

Haze jerked his arm away but he only pulled the blind man nearer. "Listen," he said, "I'm as clean as you are."

"Fornication," the blind man said.

"That ain't nothing but a word," Haze said. "If I was in Sin I was in it before I ever committed any. Ain't no change come in me." He was trying to pry the fingers off from around his arm but die blind man kept wrapping them tighter. "I don't believe in Sin," he said. "Take your hand off me."

"You do," die blind man said, "you're marked."

"I ain't marked," Haze said, "I'm free."

"You're marked free," die blind man said. "Jesus loves you and you can't escape his mark. Go to the head of die stairs and. . . ."

Haze jerked his arm free and jumped up. "I'll take diem up there and throw them over into die bushes," he said. "You be looking! See can you see."

"I can see more than you I" the blind man shouted. "You got eyes and see not, ears and hear not, but Jesus'll make you see!"

"You be watching if you can see!" Haze said, and started running up the steps. People were already coming out die auditorium doors and some were halfway down the steps. He pushed through diem with his elbows out like sharp wings and when he got to the top, a new surge of them pushed him back almost to where he had

started up. He fought through them again until somebody hol lered, "Make room for this idiot!" and people got out of his way. He rushed to the top and pushed his way over to the side and stood tliere, glaring and panting.

"I never followed him," he said aloud. "I wouldn't follow a blind fool like that. My Jesus." He stood against the building, holding die stack of leaflets by the string. A fat man stopped near him to light a cigar, and Haze pushed his shoulder. "Look down yonder," he said. "See that blind man down there, he's giving out tracts. Jesus. You ought to see him and he's got this here ugly child dressed up in woman's clothes, giving them out too. My Jesus."

"There's always fanatics," the fat man said, moving on.

"My Jesus," Haze said. He leaned forward near an old woman with orange hair and a collar of red wooden beads. "You better get on the other side, lady," he said. "There's a fool down there giving out tracts." The crowd behind the old woman pushed her on, but she looked at him for an instant with two bright flea eyes. He started toward her through the people but she was already too far away, and he pushed back to where he had been standing against the wall. "Sweet Jesus Christ crucified," he said, and felt something turn in his chest. The crowd was moving fast. It was like a big spread ravelling and the separate threads disappeared down the dark streets until there was nothing left of it and he was standing on the porch of the auditorium by himself. The tracts were speckled all over the steps and on the sidewalk and out into the street. The blind man was standing down on the first step, bent over, feeling for the crumpled pamphlets scattered around him. Enoch Emery was over on the other side, standing on the lion's head and trying to balance himself, and the child was picking up the pamphlets that were not too crushed to use again and putting them back in the gunny sack.

I don't need no Jesus, Haze said. I don't need no Jesus. I got Leora Watts.

He ran down the steps to where the blind man was, and stopped. He stood there for a second just out of reach of his hands which had begun to grope forward, hunting the sound of his step, and then he started across the street. He was on the other side before the voice pierced after him. He turned and saw the blind man standing in the middle of the street, shouting, "Shrike! Shrike! My name is Asa Shrike when you want me!" A car had to swerve to the side to keep from hitting him.

Haze drew his head down nearer his hunched shoulders and went on quickly. He didn't look back until he heard die footsteps coming behind him.

"Now that we got shut of diem," Enoch Emery panted, "whyn't we go sommer and have us some fun?" "Listen," Haze said roughly, "I got business of my own.

I seen all of you I want." He began walking very fast.

Enoch kept skipping steps to keep up. "I been here two months," he said, "and I don't know nobody. People ain't friendly here. I got me a room and there ain't never nobody in it but me. My daddy said I had to come. I wouldn't never have come but he made me. I think I seen you sommers before. You ain't from Stockwell, are you?"

"No."

"Melsy?"

"No."

"Sawmill set up there oncet," Enoch said. "Look like you had a kind of familer face."

They walked on widiout saying anydiing until diey got on die main street again. It was almost deserted. "Goodby," Haze said and quickened his walk again.

"I'm going thisaway too," Enoch said in a sullen voice. On die left there was a movie house where die electric bill was being changed. "We hadn't got tied up with diem hicks, we could have gone to a show," he muttered. He strode along at Haze's elbow, talking in a half mumble, half whine. Once he caught at his sleeve to slow him down and Haze jerked it away. "He made me come," he said in a cracked voice. Haze looked at him and saw he was crying, his face seamed and wet and a purple-pink color. "I ain't but eighteen year," he cried, "and he made me come and I don't know nobody, nobody here'll have nodiing to do widi nobody else. They ain't friendly. He done gone off widi a woman and made me come but she ain't gonna stay for long, he's gonna beat hell out of her before she gets herself stuck to a chair. You die first familer face I seen in two mondis, I seen you sommers before. I know I seen you sommers before."

Haze looked straight ahead with his face set hard, and Enoch kept up the half mumble, half blubber. They passed a church and a hotel and an antique shop and turned up a street full of brick houses, each alike in the darkness.

"If you want you a woman you don't have to be follerin nothing looked like her," Enoch said. "I heard about where there's a house **full** of two-dollar ones. Whyn't we go have us some fun? I could pay you back next week."

"Look," Haze said, "I'm going where I stay—two doors from here. I got a woman. I got a woman, you understand? I don't need to go witii you."

"I could pay you back next week," Enoch said. "I work at the city zoo. I guard

a gate and I get paid ever week."

"Get away from me," Haze said.

"People ain't friendly here. You ain't from here and you ain't friendly neitlier."
Haze didn't answer him. He went on with his neck drawn close to his shoulder blades as if he were cold.

"You don't know nobody neidier," Enoch said. "You ain't got no woman or nothing to do. I knew when I first seen you you didn't have nobody or nothing. I seen you and I knew it."

"This is where I live," Haze said, and he turned up the walk of the house without looking back at Enoch.

Enoch stopped. "Yeah," he cried, "oh yeah," and he ran his sleeve under his nose to stop the snivel. "Yeah," he cried. "Go on where you goin but looker here." He slapped at his pocket and ran up and caught Haze's sleeve and rattled the peeler box at him. "She give me this. She give it to me and there ain't nothing you can do about it. She invited me to come to see them and not you and it was you follerin them." His eyes glinted through his tears and his face stretched in an evil crooked grin.

Haze's mouth jerked but he didn't say anything. He stood tiiere for an instant, small in the middle of the steps, and then he raised his arm and hurled the stack of tracts he had been carrying. It **hit** Enoch in the chest and knocked his mouth open. He stood looking, witli his mouth hanging open, at where it had hit his front, and then he turned and tore off down the street; and Haze went into the house.

The night before was the first time he had slept with Leora Watts or any woman, and he had not been very successful with her. When he finished, he was like something washed ashore on her, and she had made obscene comments about him, which he remembered gradually during the day. He was uneasy in the thought of going to her again. He didn't know what she would say when she opened the door and saw him there.

When she opened the door and saw him there, she said, "Ha ha." She was a big blonde woman with a green nightgown on. "What do YOU want?" she said.

He put his face into what he thought was an all-knowing expression but it was only stretched a little on one side. The black wool hat sat on his head squarely. Leora left the door open and went back to the bed. He came in with his hat on and when it knocked the sacked electric lightbulb, he took it off. Leora rested her face on her hand and watched him. He began to move around the room examining this and that. His throat got dryer and his heart began to grip him like a little ape clutching the bars of its cage. He sat down on the edge of her bed,

with his hat in his hand.

Leora's eyes had narrowed some and her mouth had widened and got thin as a knife blade. "That Jesus-seeing hat!" she said.

She sat up and pulled her nightgown from under her and took it off. She reached for his hat and put it on her head and sat with her hands on her hips, watching him. Haze stared blank-faced for a minute, then he made three quick noises that were laughs. He jumped for the electric light cord and undressed in the dark.

Once when he was small, his father took him and his sister, Ruby, to a carnival that stopped in Melsy. There was one tent that cost more money, a little off to the side. A dried-up man with a horn voice was barking it. He never said what was inside. He said it was so SINsational that it would cost any man wanted to see it thirty-five cents, and it was so EXclusive, only fifteen could get in at a time. His father sent him and Ruby to a tent where two monkeys danced, and then he made for it, moving shuttle-faced and close to the walls of things, like he moved. Haze left the monkeys and followed him, but he didn't have thirty-five cents. He asked the barker what was inside.

"Beat it," the man said, "there ain't no pop and there ain't no monkeys."

"I already seen them," he said.

"That's fine," the man said, "beat it."

"I got fifteen cents," he said. "Whyn't you lemme in and I could see half of it." It's something about a privy, he was thinking. It's some men in a privy. Then he thought, maybe it's a man and a woman in a privy. She wouldn't want me in there. "I got fifteen cents," he said.

"It's more than half over," the man said, fanning with his straw hat. "You run along."

"That'll be fifteen cents worth then," Haze said.

"Scram," the man said.

"Is it a nigger?" Haze asked. "Are they doing something to a nigger?" The man leaned off his platform and his dried-up face drew into a glare. "Where'd you get that idear?" he said.

"I don't know," Haze said.

"How old are you?" the man asked.

"Twelve," Haze said. He was ten.

"Gimme that fifteen cents," the man said, "and get in there."

He slid the money on the platform and scrambled to get in before it was over.

He went through the flap of the tent and inside there was another tent and he went through that. His face was hot through to the back of his head. All he could see were the backs of the men. He climbed up on a bench and looked over their heads. They were looking down into a lowered place where something white was lying, squirming a little, in a box lined with black cloth. For a second he thought it was a skinned animal and then he saw it was a woman. She was fat and she had a face Like an ordinary woman except there was a mole on the corner of her lip, that moved when she grinned, and one on her side, that was moving too. Haze's head became so heavy he couldn't turn it away from her.

"Had one of themther built in ever casket," his father, up toward the front, said, "be a heap ready to go sooner."

He recognized the voice without looking. He fell down off the bench and scrambled out the tent. He crawled out under the side of the outside one because he didn't want to pass the barker. He got in the back of a truck and sat down in the far corner of it. The carnival was making a tin roar outside.

His mother was standing by the washpot in the yard, looking at him, when he got home. She wore black all the time and her dresses were longer than other women's. She was standing there straight, looking at him. He slid behind a tree and got out of her view, but in a few minutes he could feel her watching him through the tree. He saw the lowered place and the casket again and a thin woman in the casket who was too long for it. Her head stuck up at one end and her knees were raised to make her fit. She had a cross-shaped face and hair pulled close to her head, and she was twisting and trying to cover herself while the men looked down. He stood flat against the tree, dry-throated. She left the washpot and come toward him with a stick. She said, "What you seen?"

"What you seen?" she said.

"What you seen?" she said, using the same tone of voice all the time. She hit him across the legs with the stick, but he was like part of the tree. "Jesus died to redeem you," she said.

"I never ast Him," he muttered.

She didn't hit him again but she stood looking at him, shut-mouthed, and he forgot the guilt of the tent for the nameless un placed guilt that was in him. In a minute she threw the stick away from her and went back to the washpot, shut-mouthed.

The next day he took his shoes in. secret out into the woods. He never wore them except for revivals and in winter. He took them out of the box and filled the bottoms of them with stones and small rocks and then he put them on. He laced them up tight and walked in them through the woods what he knew to be a mile,

until he came to a creek, and then he sat down and took them off and eased his feet in the wet sand. He thought, that ought to satisfy Him. Nothing happened. If a stone had fallen he would

have taken it for a sign. After a while he drew his feet out the sand and let them dry, and then he put the shoes on again with the rocks still in them and he walked a half mile back before he took them off.

The Heart of the Park

ENOCH EMERY knew when he woke up that today the person he could show it to was going to come. He knew by his blood. He had wise blood like bis daddy.

At two o'clock that afternoon, he greeted the second-shift gate guard. "You ain't but only fifteen minutes late," he said irritably. "But I stayed. I could of went on but I stayed." He wore a green uniform widi yellow piping on die neck and sleeves and a yellow stripe down the outside of each leg. The second-shift guard, a boy widi a jutting shale-textured face and a toodipick in his moudi, wore die same. The gate diey were standing by was made of iron bars and die concrete arch diat held it was fashioned to look like two trees; branches curved to form die top of it where twisted letters said, CITY FOREST PARK. The second-shift guard leaned against one of die trunks and began prodding between his teeth widi die pick.

"Ever day," Enoch complained; "look like ever day I lose fifteen good minutes standing here waiting on you."

Every day when he got off duty, he went into die park and every day when he went in, he did die same diings. He went first to die swimming pool. He was afraid of die water but he liked to sit up on die bank above it if diere were any women in the pool, and watch diem. There was one woman who came every Monday who wore a badiing suit diat was split on each hip. At first he diought she didn't know it, and instead of watching openly on die bank, he had crawled into some bushes, snickering to himself and had watched from diere. There had been no one else in die pool—die crowds didn't come until four o'clock—to tell her about die split and she had splashed around in die water and dien lain up on the edge of die pool asleep for almost an hour, all the dme widiout suspecting diere was somebody in die bushes looking at where she came out of die suit. Then on anodier day when he stopped a little later, he saw three women, all with dieir suits split, die pool full of people, and nobody paying diem any mind. That was how the city was—always surprising him. He visited a whore every time he had two dollars to spare but he was continually being shocked by the looseness he saw in the open. He crawled into the bushes out of a sense of propriety. Very often the women would pull the suit straps down off dieir shoulders and lie stretched out.

The park was die heart of die city. He had come to die city—widi a knowing in his blood—he had established himself at die heart of it. Every day he looked at

the heart of it; every day; and he was so stunned and awed and overwhelmed diat just to think about it made him sweat. There was something, in die center of die park, that he had discovered. It was a mystery, aldiough it was right there in a glass case for everybody to see and there was a typewritten card telling all about it right there. But there was something the card couldn't say and what it couldn't say was inside him, a terrible knowledge widiout any words to it, a terrible knowledge like a big nerve growing inside him. He could not show the mystery to just anybody; but he had to show it to somebody. Who he had to show it to was a special person. This person could not be from die city but he didn't know why. He knew he would know him when he saw him and he knew that he would have to see him soon or the nerve inside him would grow so big that he would be forced to rob a bank or jump on a woman or drive a stolen car into the side of a building. His blood all morning had been saying the person would come

today. He left the second-shift guard and approached die pool from a discreet footpadi that led behind die ladies' end of die bath house to a small clearing where the enure pool could be seen at once. There was nobody in it—die water was bottle-green and motionless—but he saw, coming up the other side and heading for die bath house, the woman with the two little boys. She came every other day or so and brought die two children. She would go in die water widi diem and swim down die pool and dien she would lie up on the side in the sun. She had a stained white bathing suit that fit her like a sack,

and Enoch had watched her with pleasure on several occasions. He moved from die clearing up a slope to some abelia bushes. There was a nice tunnel under diem and he crawled into it until he came to a slightly wider place where he was accustomed to sit. He settled himself and adjusted die abelia so that he could see through it properly. His face was always very red in die bushes. Anyone who parted the abelia sprigs at just that place would think he saw a devil and would fall down the slope and into die pool. The woman and the two little boys entered die badi house.

Enoch never went immediately to the dark secret center of the park. That was the peak of die afternoon. The other things he did built up to it and they had become very formal and necessary. When he left the bushes, he would go to the FROSTY BOTTLE, a hot-dog stand in the shape of an Orange Crush widi frost painted in blue around the top of it. Here he would have a chocolate malted milkshake and would make a few suggestive remarks to the waitress whom he believed to be secretly in love with him. After that he would go to see the animals. They were in a long set of steel cages like Alcatraz Penitentiary in die movies. The cages were electrically heated in die winter and air-conditioned in die summer

and diere were six men hired to wait on die animals and feed diem T-bone steaks. The animals didn't do anydiing but lie around. Enoch watched them every day, full of awe and hate. Then he went *there.*

The two little boys ran out die bath house and dove into the water, and simultaneously a grating noise issued from the driveway on the other side of the pool. Enoch's head pierced out the bushes. He saw a high rat-colored car passing, which sounded as if its motor were dragging out die back. The car passed and he could hear it rattle around the turn in die drive and on away. He listened carefully, trying to hear if it would stop. The noise receded and then gradually grew louder. The car passed again. Enoch saw this time diat diere was only one person in it, a man. The sound of it died away again and dien grew louder. The car came around a third time and stopped almost directly opposite Enoch across the pool. The man in the car looked out the window and down the grass slope to die water where die two little boys were splashing and screaming. Enoch's head was as far out die bushes as it could come and he was squinting. The door by the man was tied on with a rope. The man got out the other door and walked in front of die car and came halfway down die slope to die pool. He stood there a minute as if he were looking for somebody and dien he sat down stiffly on die grass. He had on a suit diat looked as if it had glare in it. He sat widi his knees drawn up. "Well, I'll be dog," Enoch said. "Well, I'll be dog."

He began crawling out of the bushes immediately, his heart moving so fast it was like one of those motorcycles at fairs diat die fellow drives around die walls of a pit. He even remembered the man's name—Mr. Hazel Weaver. In a second he appeared on all fours at die end of die abelia and looked across die pool. The blue figure was still sitting there in die same position. He had die look of being held diere, like by an invisible hand, like if die hand lifted up, die figure would spring across die pool in one leap widiout die expression on his face changing once.

The woman came out die badi house and went straight to die diving board. She spread her arms out and began to bounce, making a big heavy flapping sound widi die board. Then suddenly she swirled backwards and disappeared below die water. Mr. Hazel Weaver's head turned very slowly, following her down die pool.

Enoch got up and went down die padi behind die bath house. He came stealdiily out on die odier side and started walking toward Haze. He stayed on die top of die slope, moving softly in die grass just off die sidewalk, and making no noise. When he was direcdy behind him, he sat down on die edge of die sidewalk. If his arms had been ten feet long, he could have put his hands on Haze's

shoulders. He studied him quietly.

The woman was climbing out die pool, chinning herself up on die side. First her face appeared, long and cadaverous, widi a band age-like badiing cap coming down almost to her eyes, and sharp teeth protruding from her mouth. Then she rose on her hands until a large foot and leg came up from behind her and anodier on die odier side and she was out, squatting diere, panting. She stood up loosely and shook herself, and stamped in die water dripping off her. She was facing diem and she grinned. Enoch could see a part of Hazel Weaver's face watching the woman. It didn't grin in return but it kept on watching her as she padded over to a spot of sun almost directly under where they were sitting. Enoch had to move a little to see.

The woman sat down in the spot of sun and took off her bathing cap. Her hair was short and matted and all sorts of colors, from deep rust to a polluted lemon yellow. She shook her head and then she looked up at Hazel Weaver again, grinning through her pointed teedi. She stretched herself out in the spot of sun, raising her knees and settling her backbone down against the concrete. The two little boys, at the odier end of the water, were knocking each other's heads against the side of die pool. She settled herself until she was flat against the concrete and then she reached up and pulled the bathing suit straps off her shoulders.

"King Jesus!" Enoch whispered and before he could get his eyes off the woman, Haze Weaver had sprung up and was almost to his car. The woman was sitting straight up widi die suit half off her in front, and Enoch was looking bodi ways at once. He wrenched his attention loose from die woman and darted after Hazel Weaver.

"Wait on me!" he shouted and waved his arms in front of the car which was already rattling and starting to go. Hazel Weaver cut off die motor. His face behind die windshield was sour and froglike; it looked like it had a shout closed up in it, it looked like one of tliose closet doors in gangster pictures where tliere is somebody tied to a chair behind it widi a towel in his mouth.

"Well," Enoch said, "I declare if it ain't Hazel Weaver. How are you, Hazel?"

"The guard said I'd find you at the swimming pool," Hazel Weaver said. "He said you hid in the bushes and watched the swiming."

Enoch blushed. "I alius have admired swimming," he said. Then he stuck his head fardier dirough the window. "You were looking for me?" he exclaimed.

"Those people," Haze said, "those people named Moats—did she tell you where diey lived?" Enoch didn't seem to hear. "You came out here special to see me?" he said. "Asa and Sabbadi Moats—she gave you die peeler. Did she tell you

where diey lived?" Enoch eased his head out the car. He opened die door and

climbed in beside Haze. For a minute he only looked at him, wetting his lips. Then he whispered, "I got to show you something." "I'm looking for those people," Haze said. "I got to see that man. Did she tell you where they live?"

"I got to show you this thing," Enoch said. "I got to show it to you, here, this afternoon. I got to." He gripped Hazel Weaver's arm and Hazel Weaver shook him off.

"Did she tell you where they live?" he said again.

Enoch kept wetting his lips. They were pale except for his fever blister, which was purple. "Sho," he said. "Ain't she invited me to come see her and bring my harp? I got to show you this thing," he said, "then I'll tell you."

"What thing?" Haze muttered.

"This thing I got to show you," Enoch said. "Drive straight on ahead and I'll tell you where to stop."

"I don't want to see anything of yours," Hazel Weaver said. "I got to have that address."

"I won't be able to remember it unless you come," Enoch said. He didn't look at Hazel Weaver. He looked out the window. In a minute the car started. Enoch's blood was beating fast. He knew he had to go to the FROSTY BOTTLE and the zoo before there, and he foresaw a terrible struggle with Hazel Weaver. He would have to get him there, even if he had to hit him over the head with a rock, and carry him on his back right up to it.

Enoch's brain was divided into two parts. The part in communi cation with his blood did the figuring but it never said anything in words. The other part was stocked up with all kinds of words and phrases. While the first part was figuring how to get Hazel Weaver through the FROSTY BOTTLE and the zoo, the second inquired, "Where'd you git thisyer fine car? You ought to paint you some signs on the outside it, like 'step-in, baby'—I seen one with that on it, then I seen another with. . . ."

Hazel Weaver's face might have been cut out the side of a rock.

"My daddy once owned a yeller Ford automobile he won on a ticket," Enoch murmured. "It had a roll-up top and two arials and a squirril tail all come with it. He swapped it off. Stop here! Stop here!" he yelled—they were passing the FROSTY BOTTLE.

"Where is it?" Hazel Weaver said as soon as they were inside. They were in a

dark room with a counter across the back o£ it and brown stools like toadstools in front of the counter. On the wall facing the door there was a large advertisement for ice cream, showing a cow dressed like a housewife.

"It ain't here," Enoch said. "We have to stop here on the way and get something to eat. What you want?"

"Nothing," Haze muttered. He stood stiffly in the middle of the room with his hands in his pockets and his neck drawn down inside his collar.

"Well, sit down," Enoch said. "I have to have a little drink."

Something stirred behind the counter and a woman with bobbed hair like a man's got up from a chair where she had been reading the newspaper, and came forward. She looked sourly at Enoch. She had on a once-white uniform clotted with brown stains. "What you want?" she said in a loud voice, leaning close to his ear as if he were deaf. She had a man's face and big muscled arms.

"I want a chocolate malted milkshake, baby girl," Enoch said softly. "I want a lot of ice cream in it."

She turned fiercely from him and glared at Haze.

"He says he don't want nothing but to sit down and look at you for a while," Enoch said. "He ain't hungry but for just to see you."

Haze looked woodenly at the woman and she turned her back on him and began mixing the milkshake. He sat down on the last stool in the row and started cracking his knuckles.

Enoch watched him carefully. "I reckon you done changed some," he murmured after a few minutes. Haze's neck jerked around and he started forward. "Give me those people's address. Right now," he said.

It came to Enoch in an instant. The police. His face was suddenly suffused with secret knowledge. "I reckon you ain't as uppity as you used to be," he said. "I reckon maybe," he said, "you ain't got so much cause now as you had then." Stole theter automobile, he thought.

Hazel Weaver sat back down. There was no expression on his face but inside his sour wet eyes, something moved. He turned away from Enoch.

"How come you jumped up so fast down yonder at the pool?" Enoch asked. The woman turned around to him with the malted milk in her hand. "Of course," he said evilly, "I wouldn't have had no truck with a ugly dish like that neither."

The woman thumped the malted milk on the counter in front of him. "Fifteen cents," she roared. "You're worth more than that, baby girl," Enoch said. He snickered and began gassing his malted milk through the straw.

The woman strode over to where Haze was. "What do you come in here with a son of a bitch like that for?" she shouted. "A nice quiet boy like you to come in

here with a son of a bitch. You ought to mind the company you keep." Her name was Maude and she drank whiskey all day from a fruit jar under the counter. "Jesus," she said, wiping her hand under her nose. She sat down in a straight chair in front of Haze but facing Enoch, and folded her arms across her chest. "Ever day," she said to Haze, looking at Enoch, "ever day that son of a bitch comes in here."

Enoch was thinking about the animals. They had to go next to the animals. He hated diem; just thinking about diem made his face turn a chocolate purple color as if die malted milk were rising in his head.

"You're a nice boy," she said, "I can see you got a clean nose, well keep it clean, don't go messin widi a son of a bitch like diat yonder. I always know a clean boy when I see one." She was shout ing at Enoch, but Enoch watched Hazel Weaver. It was like some thing inside Hazel Weaver was winding up, aldiough he didn't move on die outside, not even his hands. He just looked pressed down in diat blue suit, like inside it, the thing winding was getting tighter and tighter. Enoch's blood told him to hurry. He raced die milkshake up die straw.

"Yes sir," she said, "diere ain't anydiing sweeter dian a clean boy. God for my witness. And I know a clean one when I see him and I know a son a bitch when I see him and diere's a lot of dif ference and that pus-marked bastard zlurping through that straw is a goddammed son a bitch and you a clean boy had better mind how you keep him company. I know a clean boy when I see one."

Enoch screeched in die bottom of his glass. He fished fifteen cents from his pocket and laid it on die counter and got up. But Hazel Weaver was already up; he was leaning over die counter toward die woman. She didn't see him right away because she was looking at Enoch. He leaned on his hands over die counter until his face was just a foot from hers. She turned around and stared at him.

"Come on," Enoch started, "we don't have no time to be sassing around widi her. I got to show you diis right away, I got. . . ."

"I ain't clean," Haze said.

It was not until he said it again diat Enoch heard the words.

"I ain't clean," he said again, widiout any expression on his face or in his voice, just looking at the woman as if he were looking at a piece of wood.

She stared at him, startled and then outraged. "What do you diink I care!" she screamed. "Why should I give a goddamm what you are?"

"Come on," Enoch whined, "come on or I won't tell you where diem people live." He caught Haze's arm and pulled him back from die counter and toward the door.

"You bastard I" die woman screamed, "what do you think I care about any of you filthy boys?"

Hazel Weaver pushed die door open quickly and went out. He got back in his car, and Enoch jumped in behind him. "Okay," Enoch said, "drive straight on ahead down this road."

"What do you want for telling me?" Haze said. "I'm not staying here. I have to go. I can't stay here any longer."

Enoch shuddered. He began wetting his lips. "I got to show it to you," he said hoarsely. "I can't show it to nobody but you. I had a sign it was you when I seen you drive up at die pool. I knew all morning somebody was gonna come and dien when I saw you at the pool, I had diisyer sign."

"I don't care about your signs," Haze said.

"I go to see it ever day," Enoch said. "I go ever day but I ain't ever been able to take nobody else widi me. I had to wait on die sign. I'll tell you diem people's address just as soon as you see it. You got to see it," he said. "When you see it, somediing's going to happen."

"Nothing's going to happen," Haze said.

He started the car again and Enoch sat forward on the seat.
"Them animals," he muttered. "We got to walk by them first. It won't take long for that. It won't take a minute." He saw the animals waiting evil-eyed for him, ready to throw him off time. He thought what if the police were screaming out here now with sirens and squad cars and they got to Hazel Weaver just before he showed it to him.

"I got to see those people," Haze said. "Stop here! Stop here!" Enoch cried.

There was a long shining row of steel cages over to the left and
behind the bars, black figures were sitting or pacing. "Get out," Enoch said.
"This won't take one second." Haze got out. Then he stopped. "I got to see those people," he

said. "Okay, okay, come on," Enoch whined. "I don't believe you know the

address." "I dol I dol" Enoch cried. "It begins with a two, now come
on I" He pulled Haze toward the cages. There were two black bears in the first one. They were sitting facing each other like two matrons having tea, their faces polite and self-absorbed. "They don't do nothing but sit there all day and stink," Enoch said. "A man comes and washes theseyer cages out ever morning with a hose and it stinks just as much as if he'd left it." Every animal there had a

personal haughty hatred for him like society people have for climbers. He went on past two more cages of bears, not even looking at them, and then he stopped at the next cage where there were two yellow-eyed wolves nosing around the edges of the concrete. "Hyenas," he said. "I ain't got no use for hyenas." He leaned closer and spit into the cage, hitting one of the wolves on the leg. It shuttled to one side, giving him a slanted evil look. For a second he forgot Hazel Weaver. Then he looked back quickly to make sure he was still there. He was right behind him. He was not looking at the animals. Thinking about them police, Enoch thought. He said, "Come on, we don't have to look at all theseyer monkeys that come next." Usually he stopped at every cage and made an obscene comment aloud to himself, but today the animals were only a form he had to get through. He hurried past the cages of monkeys, looking back two or three times to make sure Hazel Weaver was behind him. At

the last of the monkey cages, he stopped as if he couldn't help himself.

"Look at that ape," he said, glaring. The animal had its back to him, gray except for a small pink seat. "If I had a ass like that," he said prudishly, "I'd sit on it. I wouldn't be exposing it to all these people come to this park. Come on, we don't have to look at theseyer birds that come next." He ran past the cages of birds and then he was at the end of the zoo. "Now we don't need the car," he said, going on ahead, "we'll go right down that hill yonder through them trees." He stopped and saw that Hazel Weaver instead of being behind him had stopped at the last cage for birds. "Oh Jesus," he groaned. He stood and waved his arms wildly and shouted, "Come on I" but Haze didn't move from where he was looking into the cage.

Enoch ran back to him and grabbed him by the arm but Haze pushed him off absently and kept on looking in the cage. It was empty. Enoch stared. "It's empty I" he shouted. "What do you have to look in that ole empty cage for? You come on." He stood there, sweating and purple. "It's empty!" he shouted; and then he saw it wasn't empty. Over in one corner on die floor of the cage, there was an eye. The eye was in die middle of sometliing that looked like a piece of mop and the piece of mop was sitting on an old rag. He squinted close to the wire and saw that the piece of mop was an owl with one eye open. It was looking directly at Hazel Weaver. "That ain't nothing but an ole hoot owl," he moaned. "You seen diem before."

"I ain't clean," Haze said to the eye. He said it just like he said it to die woman in die FROSTY BOTTLE. The eye shut softly and the owl turned its head to die wall.

He's done murdered somebody, Enoch thought. "Oh sweet Jesus come on!" he wailed. "I got to show you this right now." He pulled him away but a few feet

from die cage Haze stopped again, looking at somediing in the distance. Enoch's eyesight was very poor. He squinted and made out a figure far down die road behind them. There were two smaller figures jumping on either side of it.

Hazel Weaver turned back to him suddenly and said, "Where's this thing? Let's see it right now. Come on."

"Ain't that where I been trying to take you," Enoch murmured. He felt the perspiration drying on him and stinging and his skin began to get pin-pointed, even in his scalp. "We got to go on foot," he said.

"Why?" Haze muttered.

"I don't know," Enoch said. He knew something was going to happen to him. He *new* something was going to happen to him. His blood stopped beating. All the time it had been beating like drum noises and now it had stopped. They started down the hill. It was a steep hill, full of trees painted white from the ground up four feet. They looked as if they had on ankle-socks. He gripped Hazel Weaver's arm. "It gets damp as you go down," he said, looking around vaguely. Hazel Weaver shook him off. In a second, he gripped his arm again and stopped him. He pointed down through the trees. "Muvseevum," he said. The strange word made him shiver. That was the first time he had ever said it aloud. A piece of gray building was showing where he pointed. It grew larger as they went down the hill, then as they came to the end of the wood and stepped out on the gravel driveway, it seemed to shrink suddenly. It was round and soot-colored. There were columns at the front of it and in between each column there was an eyeless woman holding a pot on her head. A concrete band was over the columns

and the letters MVSEV M were cut into it. Enoch was afraid to pronounce the word again.

"We got to go up die steps and through the front door," he whispered. There were ten steps up to the porch. The door was wide and black. Enoch pushed it in cautiously and inserted his head in the crack. In a minute he brought it out again and said, "All right, go in and walk easy. I don't want to wake up theter ole guard. He ain't very friendly with me." They went into a dark hall. It was heavy with the odor of linoleum and creosote and another odor behind these two. The third one was an undersmell and Enoch couldn't name it as anydiing he had ever smelled before. There was nothing in the hall but two urns and an old man asleep in a straight chair against the wall. He had on the same kind of uniform as Enoch and he looked like a dried up spider stuck there. Enoch looked at Hazel Weaver to see if he was smelling the undersmell. He looked like he

was; Enoch's blood began beating again, and the sound was nearer this time like the drums had moved up about a quarter of a mile. He gripped Haze's arm and

tip-toed through the hall to another black door at the end of it. He cracked it a little and inserted his head in die crack. Then in a second he drew it out and crooked his finger in a gesture for Haze to follow him. They went into another hall, like the last one but running crosswise. "It's in that first door yonder," Enoch said in a small voice. They went into a dark room full of glass cases. The glass cases covered the walls and there were three coffin-like ones in the middle of die floor. The ones on the walls were full of birds tilted on varnished sticks and looking down widi dried piquant expressions.

"Come on," Enoch whispered. The drum noises in his blood were getting closer and closer. He went past the two cases in the middle of the floor and toward the third one. He went to the farthest end of it and stopped. He stood looking down with his neck thrust forward and his hands clutched together; Hazel Weaver moved up beside him.

The two of them stood there, Enoch rigid and Hazel Weaver bent slightly forward. There were three bowls and a row of blunt weapons and a man in the case. It was the man Enoch was looking at. He was about three feet long. He was naked and a dried yellow color and his eyes were squinched shut as if a giant block of steel were falling down on top of him.

"See theter notice," Enoch said in a church whisper, pointing to a typewritten card at the man's foot, "it says he was once as tall as us. Some A-rabs did it to him in six months." He turned his head cautiously to see Hazel Weaver.

All he could tell was that Hazel Weaver's eyes were on the shrunken man. He was bent forward so that his face was reflected in the glass top of the case. The reflection was pale and the eyes were like two clean bullet holes. Enoch waited, rigid. He heard footsteps in the hall. Oh Jesus Jesus, he prayed, let him hurry up and do whatever he's going to dol The footsteps came in the door. He saw the woman with the two little boys. She had one by each hand, and she was grinning. Hazel Weaver had not raised his eyes once from the shrunken man. The woman came toward them. She stopped on the other side of the case and looked down into it, and the reflection of her face appeared grinning on the glass, over Hazel Weaver's. She snickered and put two fingers in front of her teeth. The little boys' faces were like pans set on either side to catch the grins that overflowed from her. Haze's neck jerked back and he made a noise. It was a noise like Enoch hadn't ever heard before. It might have come from the man inside the case. In a second Enoch knew it had. "WaitI" he screamed, and tore out the room after Hazel Weaver.

He overtook him halfway up the hill. He caught him by the arm and swung him around and then he stood there, suddenly weak and light as a balloon, and stared. Hazel Weaver grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him. "What is that

address?" he shouted. "Give me that address I"

Even if Enoch had known the address, he couldn't have thought of it then. He could not even stand up. As soon as Hazel Weaver let him go, he fell backwards and landed against one of the white-socked trees. He rolled over and lay stretched out on the ground, with an exalted look on his face. He thought he was floating. A long way off he saw the blue figure spring and pick up a rock, and he saw the wild face turn, and the rock hurtle toward him; he smiled and shut his eyes. When he opened them again, Hazel Weaver was gone. He put his fingers to his forehead and then held them in front of his eyes. They were red-streaked. He turned his head and saw a drop of blood on the ground and as he looked at it, he thought it widened like a little spring. He sat straight up, frozen-skinned, and put his finger in it, and very faintly he could hear his blood beating, his secret blood, in the center of the city.

A Stroke of Good Fortune

RUBY came in the front door of the apartment building and lowered the paper sack with the four cans of number three beans in it onto the hall table. She was too tired to take her arms from around it or to straighten up and she hung there collapsed from the hips, her head balanced like a big florid vegetable at the top of the sack. She gazed with stony unrecognition at the face that confronted her in the dark yellow-spotted mirror over the table. Against her right cheek was a gritty collard leaf that had been stuck there half the way home. She gave it a vicious swipe with her arm and straightened up, muttering, "Collards, collards," in a voice of sultry subdued wrath. Standing up straight, she was a short woman, shaped nearly like a funeral urn. She had mulberry-colored hair stacked in sausage rolls around her head but some of these had come loose with the heat and the long walk from the grocery store and pointed frantically in various directions. "Collard greens!" she said, spitting the word from her mouth this time as if it were a poisonous seed. She and Bill Hill hadn't eaten collard greens for five years and she wasn't going to start cooking them now. She had bought these on account of Rufus but she wasn't going to buy them but once. You would have thought that after two years in the armed forces Rufus would have come back ready to eat like somebody from somewhere; but no. When she asked him what he would like to have *special*, he had not had the gumption to think of one civilized dish—he had said collard greens. She had expected Rufus to have turned out into somebody with some get in him. Well, he had about as much get as a floor mop. Rufus was her baby brother who had just come back from the European Theater. He had come to live with her because Pitman where they were raised was not there any more. All the people who had lived in Pitman had had the good sense to leave it, either by dying or by moving to die city. She had married Bill B. Hill, a Florida man who sold Miracle Products, and had come to live in the city. If Pitman had still been there, Rufus would have been in Pitman. If one chicken had been left to walk across the road in Pitman, Rufus would have been there too to keep him company. She didn't like to admit it about her own kin, least about her own brother, but there he was—good for absolutely nothing. "I seen it after five minutes of him," she had told Bill Hill and Bill Hill, with no expression whatsoever, had said, "It taken me diree." It was mortifying to let diat kind of a husband see you had that kind of a brother.

She supposed there was no help for it. Rufus was like the other children. She was the only one in her family who had been different, who had had any get. She took a stub of pencil from her pocketbook and wrote on the side of the sack: Bill you bring this upstairs. Then she braced herself at the bottom of the steps for the climb to the fourth floor.

The steps were thin black rent in the middle of the house, covered with a mole-colored carpet that looked as if it grew from the floor. They stuck straight up like steeple steps, it seemed to her. They reared up. The minute she stood at die bottom of them, they reared up and got steeper for her benefit. As she gazed up them, her mouth widened and turned down in a look of complete disgust. She was in no condition to go up anything. She was sick. Madam Zoleeda had told her but not before she knew it herself.

Madam Zoleeda was the palmist on Highway 87. She had said,

"A long illness," but she had added, whispering, widi a very I-al ready-know-but-I-won't-tell look, "It will bring you a stroke of good fortune I" and then had sat back grinning, a stout woman with green eyes that moved in their sockets as if they had been oiled. Ruby didn't need to be told. She had already figured out die good fortune. Moving. For two months she had had a distinct feeling that they were going to move. Bill Hill couldn't hold off much longer. He couldn't kill her. Where she wanted to be was in a subdivision—she started up die steps, leaning forward and holding onto the banisters —where you had your drugstores and grocery and a picture show right in your own neighborhood. As it was now, living downtown, she had to walk eight blocks to the main business streets and farther than that to get to a supermarket. She hadn't made any complaints for five years much but now with her health at stake as young as she was what did he think she was going to do, kill herself? She had her eye on a place in Meadowcrest Heights, a duplex bungalow widi yellow awnings. She stopped on the fifth step to blow. As young as she was—thirty-four—you wouldn't think five steps would stew her. You better take it easy, baby, she told herself, you're too young to bust your gears.

Thirty-four wasn't old, wasn't any age at all. She remembered her mother at thirty-four—she had looked like a puckered-up old yellow apple, sour, she had always looked sour, she had always looked like she wasn't satisfied with anything. She compared herself at thirty-four with her modier at that age. Her mother's hair had been gray —hers wouldn't be gray now even if she hadn't touched it up. All those children were what did her mother in—eight of them: two born dead, one died die first year, one crushed under a mowing machine.

Her mother had got deader with every one of diem. And all of for what? Because she hadn't known any better. Pure ignorance. The purest of downright ignorance!

And there her two sisters were, both married four years with four children apiece. She didn't see how they stood it, always going to the doctor to be jabbed at with instruments. She remembered when her mother had had Rufus. She was the only one of die children who couldn't stand it and she walked all die way in to Melsy, in die hot sun ten miles, to the picture show to get clear of the screaming, and had sat through two westerns and a horror picture and a serial and then had walked all the way back and found it was just beginning, and she had had to listen all night. All diat misery for Rufus 1 And him turned out now to have no more charge dian a dish rag. She saw him waiting out nowhere before he was born, just waiting, waiting to make his mother, only diirty-four, into an old woman. She gripped die banister rail fiercely and heaved herself up another step, shaking her head. Lord, she was disappointed in him! After she had told all her friends her brother was back from the European Theater, here he comes—sounding like he'd never been out of a hog lot.

He looked old too. He looked older than she did and he was fourteen years younger. She was extremely young looking for her age. Not that thirty-four is any age and anyway she was married. She had to smile, thinking about that, because she had done so much better tiian her sisters—they had married from around. "This breatlilessness," she muttered, stopping again. She decided she would have to sit down.

There were twenty-eight steps in each flight—twenty-eight.

She sat down and jumped quickly, feeling something under her. She caught her breath and tlien pulled the thing out: it was Hartley Gilfeet's pistol. Nine inches of treacherous tin! He was a six-yearold boy who lived on the fifth floor. If he had been hers, she'd have worn him out so hard so many times he wouldn't know how to leave his mess on a public stair. She could have fallen down tiiose stairs as easy as not and ruined herself! But his stupid mother wasn't going to do anything to him even if she told her. All she did was scream at him and tell people how smart he was. "Little Mister Good Fortune!" she called him. "All his poor daddy left me!" His daddy had said on his death bed, "There's nothing but him I ever given you," and she had said, "Rodman, you given me a fortune!" and so she called him Little Mister Good Fortune. "I'd wear die seat of his good fortune out!" Ruby muttered.

The steps were going up and down" like a seesaw with her in the middle of it. She did not want to get nauseated. Not that again. Now

no. No. She was not. She sat tightly to the steps with her eyes shut until tiie dizziness stopped a little and the nausea subsided. No, I'm not going to no doctor, she said. No. No. She was not. They would have to carry her there knocked out before she would go. She had done all right doctoring herself all tiiese years—no bad sick spells, no teeth out, no children, all that by herself. She would have had five children right now if she hadn't been careful.

She had wondered more than once if this breadilessness could be heart trouble. Once in a while, going up the steps, there'd be a pain in her chest along with it. That was what she wanted it to be—heart trouble. They couldn't very well remove your heart. They'd have to knock her in the head before they'd get her near a hospital, they'd have to—suppose she would die if they didn't?

She wouldn't.

Suppose she would?

She made herself stop this gory thinking. She was only thirty-four. There was nothing permanent wrong with her. She was fat and her color was good. She thought of herself again in comparison with her mother at thirty-four and she pinched her arm and smiled. Seeing that her mother or fatlier neitiier had been much to look at, she had done very well. They had been the dried-up type, dried up and Pitman dried into them, tiiem and Pitman shrunk down into something all dried and puckered up. And she had come out of that! A somebody as alive as her! She got up, gripping the banister rail but smiling to herself. She was warm and fat and beautiful and not too fat because Bill Hill liked her that way. She had gained some weight but he hadn't noticed except that he was maybe more happy lately and didn't know why. She felt the wholeness of herself, a whole thing climbing the stairs. She was up the first flight now and she looked back, pleased. As soon as Bill Hill fell down these steps once, maybe they would move. But they would move before that! Madam Zoleeda had known. She laughed aloud and moved on down the hall. Mr. Jerger's door grated and startled her. Oh Lord, she thought, *him*. He was a second-floor resident who was peculiar.

He peered at her coming down the hall. "Good morning!" he said, bowing the upper part of his body out the door. "Good morning to you!" He looked like a goat. He had little raisin eyes and a string beard and his jacket was a green that

was almost black or a black that was almost green.

"Morning," she said. "Hower you?"

"Weill" he screamed. "Well indeed on this glorious day!" He was seventy-eight years old and his face looked as if it had mildew on it. In the mornings he studied and in the afternoons he walked up and down tiie sidewalks, stopping children and asking them questions. Whenever he heard anyone in the hall, he openeH his door and looked out.

"Yeah, it's a nice day," she said languidly.

"Do you know what great birthday this is?" he asked.

"Uh-uh," Ruby said. He always had a question like that. A history question that nobody knew; he would ask it and men make a speech on it. He used to teach in a high school.

"Guess," he urged her. "Abraham Lincoln," she muttered. "Hah! You are not trying," he said. "Try." "George Washington," she said, starting up the stairs. "Shame on you!" he cried. "And your husband from there! Florida! Florida! Florida's birthday," he shouted. "Come in here." He disappeared into his room, beckoning a long finger at her.

She came down the two steps and said, "I gotta be going," and stuck her head inside the door. The room was die size of a large closet and the walls were completely covered with picture postcards of local buildings; this gave an illusion of space. A single transparent bulb hung down on Mr. Jerger and a small table.

"Now examine this," he said. He was bending over a book, running his finger under die lines: " 'On Easter Sunday, April 3, 1516, he arrived on the tip of this continent.' Do you know who this *he* was?" he demanded. "Yeah, Christopher Columbus." Ruby said.

"Ponce de Leon!" he screamed. "Ponce de Leon! You should know somediing about Florida," he said. "Your husband is from Florida." "Yeah, he was born in Miami," Ruby said. "He's not from Ten nessee." "Florida is not a noble state," Mr. Jerger said, "but it is an impor tant one." "It's important alrighto," Ruby said. "Do you know who Ponce de Leon was?" "He was the founder of Florida," Ruby said brightly. "He was a Spaniard," Mr. Jerger said. "Do you know what he was looking for?" "Florida," Ruby said. "Ponce de Leon was looking for the fountain of youth," Mr. Jerger said, closing his eyes. "Oh," Ruby muttered. "A certain spring," Mr. Jerger went on, "whose water gave perpetual youth to those who drank it. In other words," he said, "he was trying to be young always."

"Did he find it?" Ruby asked.

Mr. Jerger paused with his eyes still closed. After a minute he said, "Do you think he found it? Do you think he found it? Do you think nobody else would have got to it if he had found it? Do you think there would be one person living on this earth who hadn't drunk it?"

"I hadn't thought," Ruby said.

"Nobody thinks any more," Mr. Jerger complained.

"I got to be going."

"Yes, it's been found," Mr. Jerger said.

"Where at?" Ruby asked.

"I have drunk of it."

"Where'd you have to go to?" she asked. She leaned a little closer and got a whiff of him that was like putting her nose under a buzzard's wing.

"Into my heart," he said, placing his hand over it.

"Oh." Ruby moved back. "I gotta be going. I think my brother's home." She got over die door sill. "Ask your husband if he knows what great birthday this is," Mr. Jerger said, looking at her coyly.

"Yeah, I will." She turned and waited until she heard his door click. She looked back to see that it was shut and then she blew out her breath and stood facing the dark remaining steep of steps. "God Almighty," she commented. They got darker and steeper as you went up.

By die time she had climbed five steps her breadi was gone. She continued up a few more, blowing. Then she stopped. There was a pain in her stomach. It was a pain like a piece of somediing pushing something else. She had felt it before, a few days ago. It was the one that frightened her most. She had thought the word *cancer* once and dropped it instantly because no horror like that was coming to her because it couldn't. The word came back to her immediately with the pain but she slashed it in two with Madam Zoleeda. It will end in good fortune. She slashed it twice dirough and then again until diere were only pieces of it that couldn't be recognized. She was going to stop on the next floor—God, if she ever got up there—and talk to Laverne Watts. Laverne Watts was a third-floor resident, the secretary to a chiropodist, and an especial friend of hers.

She got up there, gasping and feeling as if her knees were full of fizz, and knocked on Laverne's door with the butt of Hartley Gilfeet's gun. She leaned on the door frame to rest and suddenly die floor around her dropped on both sides. The walls turned black and she felt herself reeling, without breath, in the middle of die air, terrified at the drop that was coming. She saw die door open a great distance away and Laverne, about four inches high, standing in it.

Laverne, a tall straw-haired girl, let out a great guffaw and slapped her side as

if she had just opened die door on die most comical sight she had yet seen. "That gun!" she yelled. "That gunl That look!" She staggered back to die sofa and fell on it, her legs rising higher dian her hips and falling down again helplessly widi a thud.

The floor came up to where Ruby could see it and remained, dipping a little. With a terrible stare of concentration, she stepped down to get on it. She scrutinized a chair across the room and dien headed for it, putting her feet carefully one before the odier.

"You should be in a wild-west show!" Laverne Watts said. "You're a howl!"

Ruby reached the chair and then edged herself onto it. "Shut up," she said hoarsely. Laverne sat forward, pointing at her, and dien fell back on die

sofa, shaking again.

"Quit diat!" Ruby yelled. "Quit that* I'm sick."

Laverne got up and took two or three long strides across the room. She leaned down in front of Ruby and looked into her face widi one eye shut as if she were squinting through a keyhole. "You are sort of purple," she said.

"I'm damn sick," Ruby glowered.

Laverne stood looking at her and after a second she folded her arms and very pointedly stuck her stomach out and began to sway back and forth. "Well, what'd you come in here with diat gun for? Where'd you get it?" she asked.

"Sat on it," Ruby muttered.

Laverne stood there, swaying with her stomach, stuck out, and a very wise expression growing on her face. Ruby sat sprawled in die chair, looking at her feet. The room was getting still. She sat up and glared at her ankles. They were swollen! I'm not going to no doctor, she started, I'm not going to one. I'm not going. "Not going," she began to mumble, "to no doctor, not . . ."

"How long you think you can hold off?" Laverne murmured and began to giggle.

"Are my ankles swollen?" Ruby asked.

"They look like they've always looked to me," Laverne said, dirowing herself down on the sofa again. "Kind of fat." She lifted her own ankles up on the end pillow and turned them slightly. "How do you like these shoes?" she asked. They were a grasshopper green with very high thin heels.

"I think they're swollen," Ruby said. "When I was coming up diat last flight of stairs I had the awfulest feeling, all over me like ..."

"You ought to go on to the doctor."

"I don't need to go to no doctor," Ruby muttered. "I can take care of myself. I haven't done bad at it all this time." "Is Rufus at home?" "I don't know. I kept myself away from doctors all my life. I kept —why?"

"Why what?"

"Why, is Rufus at home?"

"Rufus is cute," Laverne said. "I thought I'd ask him how he liked my shoes."

Ruby sat up with a fierce look, very pink and purple. "Why Rufus?" she growled. "He ain't but a baby." Laverne was thirty years old. "He don't care about women's shoes."

Laverne sat up and took off one of the shoes and peered inside it. "Nine B," she said. "I bet he'd like what's in it." "That Rufus ain't but an enfant!" Ruby said. "He don't have time to be looking at your feet. He ain't got that kind of time."

"Oh, he's got plenty of time," Laverne said.

"Yeah," Ruby muttered and saw him again, waiting, with plenty of time, out nowhere before he was born, just waiting to make his mother that much deader. "I believe your ankles are swollen," Laverne said.

"Yeah," Ruby said, twisting them. "Yeah. They feel tight sort of. I had the awfulest feeling when I got up those steps, like sort of out of breath all over, sort of tight all over, sort of—awful."

"You ought to go on to the doctor."

"No."

"You ever been to one?"

"They carried me once when I was ten," Ruby said, "but I got away. Three of them holding me didn't do any good."

"What was it that time?"

"What you looking at me that way for?" Ruby muttered.

"What way?"

"That way," Ruby said, "—swagging out that stomach of yours that way." "I just asked you what it was that time?" "It was a boil. A nigger woman up the road told me what to do

and I did it and it went away." She sat slumped on the edge of the chair, staring in front of her as if she were remembering an easier time.

Laverne began to do a kind of comic dance up and down the room. She took two or three slow steps in one direction with her knees bent and then she came back and kicked her leg slowly and painfully in die other. She began to sing in a loud guttural voice, rolling her eyes, "Put them all together, they spell

MOTHER! MOTHER!" and stretching out her arms as if she were on the stage.

Ruby's mouth opened wordlessly and her fierce expression van ished. For a half-second she was motionless; dien she sprang from the chair. "Not me!" she shouted. "Not me!"

Laverne stopped and only watched her with the wise look.

"Not me!" Ruby shouted. "Oh no not me! Bill Hill takes care of that. Bill Hill takes care of that! Bill Hill's been taking care of that for five years! That ain't going to happen to me!"

"Well old Bill Hill just slipped up about four or five mondis ago, my friend," Laverne said. "Just slipped up . . ."

"I don't reckon you know anything about it, you ain't even mar ried, you ain't even . . ."

"I bet it's not one, I bet it's two," Laverne said. "You better go on to the doctor and find out how many it is."

"It is not!" Ruby shrilled. She thought she was so smart! She didn't know a sick woman when she saw one, all she could do was look at her feet and shoe em to Rufus, shoe em to Rufus and he was an enfant and she was thirty-four years old. "Rufus is an enfant!" she wailed.

"That will make two!" Laverne said.

"You shut up talking like that!" Ruby shouted. "You shut up diis minute. I ain't going to have any baby!"

"Ha ha," Laverne said.

"I don't know how you think you know so much," Ruby said, "single as you are. If I was so single I wouldn't go around telling married people what their business is."

"Not just your ankles," Laverne said, "you're swollen all over."

"I ain't going to stay here and be insulted," Ruby said and walked carefully to die door, keeping herself erect and not looking down at her stomach the way she wanted to.

"Well I hope *all* of you feel better tomorrow," Laverne said.

"I think my heart will be better tomorrow," Ruby said. "But I hope we will be moving soon. I can't climb these steps with this heart trouble and," she added with a dignified glare, "Rufus don't care nothing about your big feet."

"You better put that gun up," Laverne said, "before you shoot somebody."

Ruby slammed die door shut and looked down at herself quickly. She was big there but she had always had a kind of big stomach. She did not stick out there different from the way she did any place else. It was natural when you took on some weight to take it on in the middle and Bill Hill didn't mind her being fat, he was just more happy and didn't know why. She saw Bill Hill's long happy face,

grinning at her from the eyes downward in a way he had as if his look got happier as it neared his teeth. He would never slip up. She rubbed her hand across her skirt and felt the tightness of it but hadn't she felt that before ? She had. It was the skirt—she had on the tight one that she didn't wear often, she had . . . she didn't have on the tight skirt. She had on the loose one. But it wasn't very loose. But that didn't make any difference, she was just fat.

She put her fingers on her stomach and pushed down and took them off quickly. She began walking toward the stairs, slowly, as if the floor were going to move under her. She began the steps. The pain came back at once. It came back with the first step. "No," she whimpered, "no." It was just a little feeling, just a little feeling like a piece of her inside rolling over but it made her breath tighten in her throat. Nothing in her was supposed to roll over. "Just one step," she whispered, "Just one step and it did it." It couldn't be cancer. Madam Zoleeda said it would end in good fortune. She began crying and saying, "Just one step and it did it," and going on up them absently as if she thought she were standing still. On the sixth one, she sat down suddenly, her hand slipping weakly down die banister spoke onto the floor.

"Noooo," she said and leaned her round red face between the two nearest poles. She looked down into the stairwell and gave a long hollow wail that widened and echoed as it went down. The stair cavern was dark green and mole-colored and the wail sounded at the very bottom like a voice answering her. She gasped and shut her eyes. No. No. It couldn't be any baby. She was not going to have something waiting in her to make her deader, she was not. Bill Hill couldn't have slipped up. He said it was guaranteed and it had worked all this time and it could not be that, it could not. She shuddered and held her hand tightly over her moudi. She felt her face drawn puckered: two born dead one died the first year and one run under like a dried yellow apple no she was only tliirty-four years old, she was old. Madam Zoleeda said it would end in no drying up. Madam Zoleeda said oh but it will end in a stroke of good fortune! Moving. She had said- it would end in a stroke of good moving.

She felt herself getting calmer. She felt herself, after a minute, getting almost calm and thought she got upset too easy; heck, it was gas. Madam Zoleeda hadn't been wrong about anything yet, she knew more than . . .

She jumped: tiiere was a bang at die bottom of the stairwell and a rumble rattling up die steps, shaking them even up where she was.

She looked tiirough the banister poles and saw Hartley Gilfeet, witii two pistols leveled, galloping up the stairs and heard a voice pierce down from die floor over her, "You Hartley, shut up that racket! You're shaking die house!" But he came on, diundering louder as he rounded the bend on the first floor and streaked up the hall. She saw Mr. Jergcr's door fly open and him spring with clawed fingers and grasp a flying piece of shirt that whirled and shot off again with a high-pitched, "Leggo, you old goat teacher I" and came on nearer until die stairs rumbled directly under her and a charging chipmunk face crashed into her and rocketed through her head, smaller and smaller into a whirl of dark.

She sat on the step, clutching the banister spoke while the breath came back into her a thimbleful at a time and the stairs stopped seesawing. She opened her eyes and gazed down into the dark hold, down to the very bottom where she had started up so long ago. "Good Fortune," she said in a hollow voice that echoed along all the levels of the cavern, "Baby."

"Good Fortune, Baby," the three echoes leered.

Then she recognized the feeling again, a little roll. It was as if it were not in her stomach. It was as if it were out nowhere in nothing, out nowhere, resting and waiting, with plenty of time.

Enoch and the Gorilla

ENOCH EMERY had borrowed his landlady's umbrella and he discovered as he stood in the entrance of the drugstore, trying to open it, that it was at least as old as she was. When he finally got it hoisted, he pushed his dark glasses back on his eyes and re-entered the downpour. The umbrella was one his landlady had stopped using fifteen years before (which was die only reason she had lent it to him) and as soon as the rain touched the top of it, it came down with a shriek and stabbed him in the back of the neck. He ran a few feet with it over his head and then backed into another store entrance and removed it. Then to get it up again, he had to place the tip of it on the ground and ram it open with his foot. He ran out again, holding his hand up near the spokes to keep them open and this allowed the handle, which was carved to represent the head of a fox terrier, to jab him every few seconds in the stomach. He proceeded for another quarter of a block this way before die back half of the silk stood up off the spokes and allowed the storm to sweep down his collar. Then he ducked under the marquee of a movie house. It was Saturday and there were a lot of children standing more or less in a line in front of the ticket box. Enoch was not very fond of children, but children always seemed to like to look at him. The line turned and twenty or thirty eyes began to observe him with a steady interest. The umbrella had assumed an ugly position, half up and half down, and die half that was up was about to come down and spill more water under his collar. When this happened the children laughed and jumped up and down. Enoch glared at them and turned his back and lowered his dark glasses. He found himself facing a life-size four-color picture of a gorilla. Over the gorilla's head, written in red letters was "GONGA! Giant Jungle Monarch and a Great Star! HERE IN PERSONIII" At die level of die gorilla's knee, diere was more that said, "Gonga will appear in person in front of diis dieater at 12 *AM. TODAY I* A free pass to the first ten brave enough to step up and shake his hand!"

Enoch was usually thinking of sometliing else at die moment that Fate began drawing back her leg to kick him. When he was four years old, his fadier had brought him home a tin box from die penitentiary. It was orange and had a picture of some peanut brittle on die outside of it and green letters tiiat said, "A NUTTY SURPRISE!" When Enoch had opened it, a coiled piece of steel had sprung out at him and broken off the ends of his two front teeth. His life was full of so many happenings like that that it would seem he should have been more sensitive to his times of danger. He stood there and read die poster twice dirough

carefully. To his mind, an opportunity to insult a successful ape came from the hand of Providence.

He turned around and asked die nearest child what time it was. The child said it was twelve-ten and tiiat Gonga was already ten minutes late. Anotlier child said diat maybe the rain had delayed him. Another said, no not the rain, his director was taking a plane from Hollywood. Enoch gritted his teeth. The first child said that if he wanted to shake the star's hand, he would have to get in line like die rest of diem and wait his turn. Enoch got in line. A child asked him how old he was. Anodier observed diat he had funny-looking teedi. He ignored all this as best he could and began to straighten out die umbrella.

In a few minutes a black truck turned around the corner and came slowly up the street in the heavy rain. Enoch pushed the umbrella under his arm and began to squint through his dark glasses. As die truck approached, a phonograph inside it began to play "Tarara Boom Di Aye," but die music was almost drowned out by die rain. There was a large illustration of a blonde on die outside of die truck, advertising some picture odier dian die gorilla's.

The children held their line carefully as die truck stopped in front of die movie house. The back door of it was constructed like a paddy wagon, with a grate, but die ape was not at it. Two men in raincoats got out of the cab part, cursing, and ran around to the back and opened the door. One of them stuck his head in and said, "Okay, make it snappy, willya?" The other jerked his thumb at the children and said, "Get back willya, willya get back?"

A voice on the record inside the truck said, "Here's Gonga, folks, Roaring Gonga and a Great Star! Give Gonga a big hand, folks!" The voice was barely a mumble in the rain.

The man who was waiting by the door of the truck stuck his head in again. "Okay willya get out?" he said.

There was a faint thump somewhere inside the van. After a second a dark furry arm emerged just enough for the rain to touch it and dien drew back inside.

"Goddamn," the man who was under the marquee said; he took off his raincoat and threw it to the man by the door, who threw it into the wagon. After two or three minutes more, the gorilla appeared at the door, with the raincoat buttoned up to his chin and the collar turned up. There was an iron chain hanging from around his neck; die man grabbed it and pulled him down and the two of diem bounded under die marquee together. A motherly-looking woman was in the glass ticket box, getting the passes ready for die first ten children brave enough to step up and shake hands.

The gorilla ignored the children entirely and followed the man over to the odier side of the entrance where diere was a small plat form raised about a foot off die ground. He stepped up on it and turned facing the children and began, to growl. His growls were not so much loud as poisonous; they appeared to issue from a black heart. Enoch was terrified and if he had not been surrounded by the children, he would have run away.

"Who'll step up first?" die man said. "Come on come on, who'll step up first? A free pass to die first kid stepping up."

There was no movement from the group of children. The man glared at diem. "What's the matter widi you kids?" he barked. "You yellow? He won't hurt you as long as I got him by this chain."

He tightened his grip on the chain and jangled it at them to show he was holding it securely.

After a minute a little girl separated herself from the group. She had long wood-shaving curls and a fierce triangular face. She moved up to within four feet of the star.

"Okay okay," the man said, rattling the chain, "make it snappy."

The ape reached out and gave her hand a quick shake. By this time there was another little girl ready and then two boys. The line re-formed and began to move up.

The gorilla kept his hand extended and turned his head away with a bored look at the rain. Enoch had got over his fear and was trying frantically to think of an obscene remark that would be suitable to insult him with. Usually he didn't have any trouble with this kind of composition but nothing came to him now. His brain, both parts, was completely empty. He couldn't think even of the insulting phrases he used every day.

There were only two children in front of him by now. The first one shook hands and stepped aside. Enoch's heart was beating violently. The child in front of him finished and stepped aside and left him facing the ape, who took his hand with an automatic motion.

It was the first hand that had been extended to Enoch since he had come to the city. It was warm and soft.

For a second he only stood there, clasping it. Then he began to stammer. "My name is Enoch Emery," he mumbled. "I attended the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy. I work at the city zoo. I seen two of your pictures. I'm only eighteen years old but I already work for the city. My daddy made me come . . ." and his voice cracked.

The star leaned slightly forward and a change came in his eyes: an ugly pair of

human ones moved closer and squinted at Enoch from behind the celluloid pair. "You go to hell," a surly voice inside the ape-suit said, low but distinctly, and the hand was jerked away.

Enoch's humiliation was so sharp and painful that he turned around three times before he realized which direction he wanted to go in. Then he ran off into the rain as fast as he could.

In spite of himself, Enoch couldn't get over the expectation that something was going to happen to him. The virtue of hope, in Enoch, was made up of two parts suspicion and one part lust. It operated on him all the rest of the day. He had only a vague idea what he wanted, but he was not a boy without ambition: he wanted to become something. He wanted to better his condition. He wanted, some day, to see a line of people waiting to shake his hand.

All afternoon he fidgeted and fooled in his room, biting his nails and shredding what was left of the silk off the landlady's umbrella. Finally he denuded it entirely and broke off the spokes. What was left was a black stick with a sharp steel point at one end and a dog's head at the other. It might have been an instrument for some specialized kind of torture that had gone out of fashion. Enoch walked up and down his room with it under his arm and realized that it would distinguish him on the sidewalk.

About seven o'clock in the evening he put on his coat and took the stick and headed for a little restaurant two blocks away. He had the sense that he was setting off to get some honor, but he was very nervous, as if he were afraid he might have to snatch it instead of receive it.

He never set out for anything without eating first. The restaurant was called the Paris Diner; it was a tunnel about six feet wide, located between a shoeshine parlor and a dry-cleaning establishment. Enoch slid in and climbed up on the far stool at the counter and said he would have a bowl of split-pea soup and a chocolate malted milk shake.

The waitress was a tall woman with a big yellow dental plate and the same color hair done up in a black hairnet. One hand never left her hip; she filled orders with the other one. Although Enoch came in every night, she had never learned to like him.

Instead of filling his order, she began to fry bacon; there was only one other customer in the place and he had finished his meal and was reading a newspaper; there was no one to eat the bacon but her. Enoch reached over the counter and prodded her hip with

the stick. "Listenhere," he said, "I got to go. I'm in a hurry."
"Go then," she said. Her jaw began to work and she stared into the skillet with a fixed attention.
"Lemme just have a piece of theter cake yonder," he said, pointing to a half of pink and yellow cake on a round glass stand. "I think I got something to do. I got to be going. Set it up there next to him," he said, indicating the customer reading die newspaper. He slid over die stools and began reading the outside sheet of die man's paper.

The man lowered die paper and looked at him. Enoch smiled. The man raised die paper again. "Could I borrow some part of your paper tliat you ain't studying?" Enoch asked. The man lowered it again and stared at him; he had muddy unflinching eyes. He leafed deliberately dirough die paper and shook out die sheet widi die comic strips and handed it to Enoch. It was Enoch's favorite part. He read it every evening like an office. While he ate the cake that the waitress had torpedoed down die counter at him, he read and felt himself surge widi kindness and courage and strengdi.

When he finished one side, he turned the sheet over and began to scan die advertisements for movies diat filled the other side. His eye went over three columns without stopping; then it came to a box that advertised Gonga, Giant Jungle Monarch, and listed the dieaters he would visit on his tour and the hours he would be at each one. In thirty minutes he would arrive at the Victory on 57th Street and that would be his last appearance in the city.

If anyone had watched Enoch read diis, he would have seen a certain transformation in his countenance. It still shone with the inspiration he had absorbed from die comic strips, but somediing else had come over it: a look of awakening.

The waitress happened to turn around to see if he hadn't gone. "What's die matter with you?" she said. "Did you swallow a seed?"

"I know what I want," Enoch murmured.

"I know what I want too," she said with a dark look.

Enoch felt for his stick and laid his change on the counter. "I got to be going." "Don't let me keep you," she said. "You may not see me again," he said, "—the way I am." "Any way I don't see you will be all right with me," she said. Enoch left. It was a pleasant damp evening. The puddles on the

sidewalk shone and die store windows were steamy and bright widi junk. He disappeared down a side street and made his way rapidly along die darker passages of the city, pausing only once or twice at the end of an alley to dart a glance in each direction before he ran on. The Victory was a small theater, suited

to the needs of the family, in one of the closer subdivisions; he passed through a succession of lighted areas and then on through more alleys and back streets until he came to the business section that surrounded it. Then he slowed up. He saw it about a block away, glittering in its darker setting. He didn't cross the street to the side it was on but kept on the far side, moving forward with his squint fixed on the glary spot. He stopped when he was directly across from it and hid himself in a narrow stair cavity that divided a building.

The truck that carried Gonga was parked across the street and the star was standing under the marquee, shaking hands with an elderly woman. She moved aside and a gentleman in a polo shirt stepped up and shook hands vigorously, like a sportsman. He was followed by a boy of about tJiree who wore a tall Western hat diat nearly covered his face; he had to be pushed ahead by the line. Enoch watched for some time, his face working with envy. The small boy was followed by a lady in shorts, she by an old man who tried to draw extra attention to himself by dancing up instead of walking in a dignified way. Enoch suddenly darted across the street and slipped noiselessly into the open back door of the truck.

The handshaking went on until the feature picture was ready to begin. Then die star got back in the van and the people filed into the theater. The driver and the man who was master of ceremonies climbed in the cab part and the truck rumbled off. It crossed die city rapidly and-continued on the highway, going very fast.

There came from die van certain thumping noises, not diose of die normal gorilla, but they were drowned out by the drone of tlie motor and the steady sound of wheels against the road. The night was pale and quiet, with nothing to stir it but an occasional com plaint from a hoot owl and the distant muted jarring of a freight train. The truck sped on until it slowed for a crossing, and as tie van rattled over *the* tracks, a figure slipped from the door and almost fell, and then limped hurriedly off toward the woods.

Once in the darkness of a pine thicket, he laid down a pointed stick he had been clutching and something bulky and loose that he

had been carrying under his arm, and began to undress. He folded each garment neatly after he had taken it off and then stacked it on top of the last thing he had removed. When all his clothes were in the pile, he took up the stick and began making a hole in the ground with it.

The darkness of the pine grove was broken by paler moonlit spots that moved over him now and again and showed him to be Enoch. His natural appearance was marred by a gash that ran from die corner of his lip to his collarbone and by a lump under his eye tiiat gave him a dulled insensitive look. Nothing could have been more deceptive for he was burning with the intensest kind of happiness.

He dug rapidly until he had made a trench about a foot long and a foot deep. Then he placed the stack of clothes in it and stood aside to rest a second. Burying his clot-hes was not a symbol to him of burying his former self; he only knew he wouldn't need them any more. As soon as he got his breath, he pushed the displaced dirt over die hole and stamped it down with his foot. He discovered while he did this that he still had his shoes on, and when he finished, he removed them and threw them from him. Then he picked up the loose bulky object and shook it vigorously.

In the uncertain light, one of his lean white legs could be seen to disappear and then the otJier, one arm and then the otiier: a black heavier shaggier figure replaced his. For an instant, it had two heads, one light and one dark, but after a second, it pulled the dark back head over die other and corrected this. It busied itself with certain hidden fastenings and what appeared to be minor adjustments of its hide.

For a time after this, it stood very still and didn't do anytiiing. Then it began to growl and beat its chest; it jumped up and down and flung its arms and thrust its head forward. The growls were thin and uncertain at first but they grew louder after a second. They became low and poisonous, louder again, low and poisonous again; diey stopped altogether. The figure extended its hand, clutched nothing, and shook its arm vigorously; it withdrew die arm, extended it again, clutched nothing, and shook. It repeated this four or five times. Then it picked up the pointed stick and placed it at a cocky angle under its arm and left the woods for the highway. No gorilla anywhere, Africa or California or New York, was happier than he.

A man and woman sitting close together on a rock just off die highway were looking across an open stretch of valley at a view of die city in die distance and dicy didn't sec die shaggy figure approaching. The smokestacks and square tops

of buildings made a black uneven wall against the lighter sky and here and diere a steeple cut a sharp wedge out of a cloud. The young man turned his neck just in dme to see the gorilla standing a few feet away, hideous and black, with its hand extended. He eased his arm from around the woman and disappeared silently into the woods. She, as soon as she turned her eyes, fled screaming down the highway. The gorilla stood as though surprised and presently its arm fell to its side. It sat down on the rock where they had been sitdng and "tared over the valley at the uneven skyline of the city.

A Good Man Is Hard to Find

THE GRANDMOTHER didn't want to go to Florida. She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey's mind. Bailey was *the* son she lived with, her only boy. He was sitting on the edge of his chair at the table, bent over die orange sports section of the *Journal*. "Now look here, Bailey," she said, "see here, read this," and she stood with one hand on her *thin* hip and the other rattling *the* newspaper at his bald head. "Here this fellow that calls himself The Misfit is aloose from the Federal Pen and headed toward Florida and you read here what it says he did to these people. Just you read it. I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that aloose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did." Bailey didn't look up from his reading so she wheeled around then and faced the children's mother, a young woman in slacks, whose face was as broad and innocent as a cabbage and was tied around with a green head-kerchief that had two points on the top like a rabbit's ears. She was sitting on the sofa, feeding the baby his apricots out of a jar. "The children have been to Florida before," the old lady said. "You all ought to take them somewhere else for a change so diey would see different parts of die world and be broad. They never have been to east Tennessee." The children's mother didn't seem to hear her but the eight-yearold boy, John Wesley, a stocky child with glasses, said, "If you don't want to go to Florida, why dontcha stay at home?" He and the little girl, June Star, were reading the funny papers on the floor. "She wouldn't stay at home to be queen for a day," June Star said without raising her yellow head.

"Yes and what would you do if this fellow, The Misfit, caught you?" the grandmother asked. "I'd smack his face," John Wesley said. "She wouldn't stay at home for a million bucks," June Star said. "Afraid she'd miss something. She has to go everywhere we go-" "All right, Miss," the grandmother said. "Just remember that the next time you want me to curl your hair." June Star said her hair was naturally curly. The next morning the grandmother was the first one in the car, ready to go. She had her big black valise that looked like the head of a hippopotamus in one corner, and underneath it she was hiding a basket with Pitty Sing, the cat, in it. She didn't intend for the cat to be left alone in the house for three days because he would miss her too much and she was afraid he might brush against one of the gas burners and accidentally asphyxiate himself. Her son, Bailey, didn't like to arrive at a motel

with a cat. She sat in the middle of the back seat with John Wesley and June Star on either side of her. Bailey and the children's mother and the baby sat in front and they left Atlanta at eight forty-five with the mileage on the car at 55890. The grandmother wrote this down because she thought it would be interesting to say how many miles they had been when they got back. It took them twenty minutes to reach the outskirts of the city. The old lady setded herself comfortably, removing her white cotton gloves and putting them up with her purse on the shelf in front of the back window. The children's mother still had on slacks and still had her head tied up in a green kerchief, but the grandmodier had on a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in die print. Her collars and cuffs were white organdy trimmed with lace and at her neckline she had pinned a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet. In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on die highway would know at once that she was a lady. She said she thought it was going to be a good day for driving, neither too hot nor too cold, and she cautioned Bailey that tiie

speed limit was fifty-five miles an hour and that die patrolmen hid diemselves behind billboards and small clumps of trees and sped out after you before you had a chance to slow down. She pointed out interesting details of die scenery: Stone Mountain; the blue granite diat in some places came up to both sides of die highway; the brilliant red clay banks slightly streaked with purple; and the various crops that made rows of green lace-work on die ground. The trees were full of silver-white sunlight and the meanest of them sparkled. The children were reading comic magazines and their mother had gone back to sleep.

"Let's go through Georgia fast so we won't have to look at it much," John Wesley said.

"If I were a little boy," said the grandmother, "I wouldn't talk about my native state that way. Tennessee has the mountains and Georgia has the hills."

"Tennessee is just a hillbilly dumping ground," John Wesley said, "and Georgia is a lousy state too."

"You said it," June Star said.

"In my time," said the grandmother, folding her thin veined fingers, "children were more respectful of their native states and dieir parents and everything else. People did right dien. Oh look at die cute little pickaninny!" she said and pointed to a Negro child standing in die door of a shack. "Wouldn't that make a picture, now?" she asked and diey all turned and looked at the little Negro out of the back window. He waved.

"He didn't have any britches on," June Star said.

"He probably didn't have any," the grandmother explained. "Little niggers in the country don't have things like we do. If I could paint, I'd paint that picture," she said.

The children exchanged comic books.

The grandmother offered to hold the baby and the children's modier passed him over die front seat to her. She set him on her knee and bounced him and told him about the things they were passing. She rolled her eyes and screwed up her moudi and stuck her leadiery thin face into his smooth bland one. Occasionally he gave her a faraway smile. They passed a large cotton field widi five or six graves fenced in the middle of it, like a small island.

"Look at the graveyard!" the grandmodier said, pointing it out. "That was the old family burying ground. That belonged to the plantation."

"Where's the plantation?" John Wesley asked.

"Gone With the Wind," said the grandmother. "Ha. Ha."

When the children finished all the comic books they had brought, they opened the lunch and ate it. The grandmother ate a peanut butter sandwich and an olive and would not let the children throw the box and the paper napkins out the window. When there was nothing else to do they played a game by choosing a cloud and making the other two guess what shape it suggested. John Wesley took one the shape of a cow and June Star guessed a cow and John Wesley said, no, an automobile, and June Star said he didn't play fair, and they began to slap each other over the grandmother.

The grandmother said she would tell them a story if they would keep quiet. When she told a story, she rolled her eyes and waved her head and was very dramatic. She said once when she was a maiden lady she had been courted by a Mr. Edgar Atkins Teagarden from Jasper, Georgia. She said he was a very good-looking man and a gentleman and that he brought her a watermelon every Saturday afternoon with his initials cut in it, E. A. T. Well, one Saturday, she said, Mr. Teagarden brought the watermelon and there was nobody at home and he left it on the front porch and returned in his buggy to Jasper, but she never got the watermelon, she said, because a nigger boy ate it when he saw the initials, E. A. T.! This story tickled John Wesley's funny bone and he giggled and giggled but June Star didn't think it was any good. She said she wouldn't marry a man diat just brought her a watermelon on Saturday. The grandmother said she would have done well to marry Mr. Teagarden because he was a gentleman and had bought Coca-Cola stock when it first came out and that he had died only a few years ago, a very wealthy man.

They stopped at The Tower for barbecued sandwiches. The Tower was a part stucco and part wood filling station and dance hall set in a clearing outside of Timothy. A fat man named Red Sammy Butts ran it and there were signs stuck here and diere on the building and for miles up and down the highway saying, TRY RED SAMMY'S FAMOUS BARBECUE. NONE LIKE FAMOUS RED SAMMY'S! RED SAM! THE FAT BOY WITH THE HAPPY LAUGH! A VETERAN! RED SAMMY'S YOUR MAN!

Red Sammy was lying on the bare ground outside The Tower with his head under a truck while a gray monkey about a foot high, chained to a small chinaberry tree, chattered nearby. The monkey sprang back into the tree and got on the highest limb as soon as he saw the children jump out of the car and run toward him.

Inside, The Tower was a long dark room with a counter at one end and tables at die other and dancing space in the middle. They all sat down at a board table next to the nickelodeon and Red Sam's wife, a tall burnt-brown woman with hair and eyes lighter than her skin, came and took dieir order. The children's mother put a dime in the machine and played "The Tennessee Waltz," and the grandmother said that tune always made her want to dance. She asked Bailey if he would like to dance but he only glared at her. He didn't have a naturally sunny disposition like she did and trips made him nervous. The grandmother's brown eyes were very bright. She swayed her head from side to side and pretended she was dancing in her chair. June Star said play sometliing she could tap to so die children's mother put in another dime and played a fast number and June Star stepped out onto the dance floor and did her tap routine.

"Ain't she cute?" Red Sam's wife said, leaning over the counter. "Would you like to come be my little girl?"

"No I certainly wouldn't," June Star said. "I wouldn't live in a broken-down place like this for a million bucks!" and she ran back to the table.

"Ain't she cute?" the woman repeated, stretching her mouth politely.

"Aren't you ashamed?" hissed the grandmother.

Red Sam came in and told his wife to quit lounging on the counter and hurry up with these people's order. His khaki trousers reached just to his hip bones and his stomach hung over them like a sack of meal swaying under his shirt. He came over and sat down at a table nearby and let out a combination sigh and yodel. "You can't win," he said. "You can't win," and he wiped his sweating red face off with a gray handkerchief. "These days you don't know who to trust," he said. "Ain't diat the truth?"

"People are certainly not nice like diey used to be," said the grandmodier.

"Two fellers come in here last week," Red Sammy said, "driving a Chrysler. It

was a old beat-up car but it was a good one and diese boys looked all right to me. Said they worked at die mill and you know I let diem fellers charge the gas diey bought? Now why did I do that?"

"Because you're a good man I" the grandmother said at once.

"Yes'm, I suppose so," Red Sam said as if he were struck widi this answer.

His wife brought die orders, carrying die five plates all at once without a tray, two in each hand and one balanced on her arm. "It isn't a soul in this green world of God's that you can trust," she said. "And I don't count nobody out of diat, not nobody," she repeated, looking at Red Sammy.

"Did you read about diat criminal, The Misfit, diat's escaped?" asked the grandmother.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he didn't attact this place right here," said die woman. "If he hears about it being here, I wouldn't be none surprised to see him. If he hears it's two cent in the cash register, I wouldn't be a tall surprised if he . . ."

"That'll do," Red Sam said. "Go bring these people their Co' Colas," and die woman went off to get die rest of die order.

"A good man is hard to find," Red Sammy said. "Everydiing is getting terrible. I remember the day you could go off and leave your screen door unlatched. Not no more."

He and die grandmodier discussed better times. The old lady said that in her opinion Europe was entirely to blame for die way things were now. She said die way Europe acted you would think we were made of money and Red Sam said it was no use talk ing about it, she was exactly right. The children ran outside into die white sunlight and looked at die monkey in die lacy china-berry tree. He was busy catching fleas on himself and bidng each one carefully between his teeth as if it were a delicacy.

They drove off again into the hot afternoon. The grandmother took cat naps and woke up every few minutes with her own snoring. Outside of Toombsboro she woke up and recalled an old plantation that she had visited in this neighborhood once when she was a young lady. She said the house had six white columns across the front and that there was an avenue of oaks leading up to it and two little wooden trellis arbors on either side in front where you sat down with your suitor after a stroll in the garden. She recalled exactly which road to turn off to get to it. She knew that Bailey would not be willing to lose any time looking at an old house, but the more she talked about it, the more she wanted to

see it once again and find out if the little twin arbors were still standing. "There was a secret panel in this house," she said craftily, not telling the truth but wishing that she were, "and the story went that all the family silver was hidden in it when Sherman came through but it was never found . . ."

"HeyI" John Wesley said. "Let's go see it! We'll find it! We'll poke all the woodwork and find it I Who lives there? Where do you turn off at? Hey Pop, can't we turn off there?"

"We never have seen a house with a secret panel!" June Star shrieked. "Let's go to the house with the secret panel I Hey Pop, can't we go see the house with the secret panel!"

"It's not far from here, I know," the grandmother said. "It wouldn't take over twenty minutes." Bailey was looking straight ahead. His jaw was as rigid as a horseshoe. "No," he said.

The children began to yell and scream that they wanted to see the house with the secret panel. John Wesley kicked the back of the front seat and June Star hung over her mother's shoulder and whined desperately into her ear that they never had any fun even on their vacation, that they could never do what THE Y wanted to do. The baby began to scream and John Wesley kicked the back of the seat so hard that his father could feel the blows in his kidney.

"All right!" he shouted and drew the car to a stop at the side of die road. "Will you all shut up? Will you all just shut up for one second? If you don't shut up, we won't go anywhere."

"It would be very educational for them," the grandmother murmured.

"All right," Bailey said, "but get this: this is the only time we're going to stop for anything like this. This is the one and only time."

"The dirt road that you have to turn down is about a mile back," the grandmother directed. "I marked it when we passed."

"A dirt road," Bailey groaned.

After they had turned around and were headed toward the dirt road, the grandmother recalled other points about the house, the beautiful glass over the front doorway and the candle-lamp in the hall. John Wesley said that the secret panel was probably in the fireplace.

"You can't go inside this house," Bailey said. "You don't know who lives there."

"While you all talk to the people in front, I'll run around behind and get in a window," John Wesley suggested.

"We'll all stay in the car," his mother said.

They turned onto the dirt road and the car raced roughly along in a swirl of pink dust. The grandmother recalled the times when

there were no paved roads and thirty miles was a day's journey. The dirt road was hilly and there were sudden washes in it and sharp curves on dangerous embankments. All at once they would be on a hill, looking down over the blue tops of trees for miles around, then the next minute, they would be in a red depression with the dust-coated trees looking down on them.

"This place had better turn up in a minute," Bailey said, "or I'm going to turn around."

The road looked as if no one had traveled on it in months.

"It's not much farther," the grandmother said and just as she said it, a horrible thought came to her. The thought was so embarrassing that she turned red in the face and her eyes dilated and her feet jumped up, upsetting her valise in the corner. The instant the valise moved, the newspaper top she had over the basket under it rose with a snarl and Pitty Sing, the cat, sprang onto Bailey's shoulder. The children were thrown to the floor and tlieir mother, clutching the baby, was thrown out the door onto the ground; the old lady was thrown into the front seat. The car turned over once and landed right-side-up in a gulch off the side of the road. Bailey remained in the driver's seat with the cat—gray-striped witli a broad white face and an orange nose—clinging to his neck like a caterpillar.

As soon as the children saw they could move their arms and legs, they scrambled out of the car, shouting, "We've had an ACCIDENT!" The grandmother was curled up under the dashboard, hoping she was injured so that Bailey's wrath would not come down on her all at once. The horrible thought she had had before the accident was that the house she had remembered so vividly was not in Georgia but in Tennessee.

Bailey removed the cat from his neck with both hands and flung it out the window against the side of a pine tree. Then he got out of the car and started looking for the children's mother. She was sitting against the side of the red gutted ditch, holding the screaming baby, but she only had a cut down her face and a broken shoulder. "We've had an ACCIDENT!" the children screamed in a frenzy of delight.

"But nobody's killed," June Star said with disappointment as the grandmother limped out of the car, her hat still pinned to her head but the broken front brim standing up at a jaunty angle and die violet spray hanging off the side. They all sat down in the ditch, except the children, to recover from the shock. They were all shaking.

"Maybe a car will come along," said the children's mother hoarsely.

"I believe I have injured an organ," said the grandmother, pressing her side, but no one answered her. Bailey's teedi were clattering. He had on a yellow sport shirt with bright blue parrots designed in it and his face was as yellow as the shirt. The grandmother decided that she would not mention that the house was in Tennessee.

The road was about ten feet above and they could see only the tops of the trees on the other side of it. Behind die ditch they were sitting in there were more woods, tall and dark and deep. In a few minutes they saw a car some distance away on top of a hill, coming slowly as if the occupants were watching them. The grandmother stood up and waved both arms dramatically to attract their attention. The car continued to come on slowly, disappeared around a bend and appeared again, moving even slower, on top of the hill they had gone over. It was a big black battered hearselike automobile. There were three men in it.

It came to a stop just over them and for some minutes, the driver looked down with a steady expressionless gaze to where diey were sitting, and didn't speak. Then he turned his head and muttered something to the other two and they got out. One was a fat boy in black trousers and a red sweat shirt witii a silver stallion embossed on the front of it. He moved around on the right side of diem and stood staring, his mouth partly open in a kind of loose grin. The other had on khaki pants and a blue striped coat and a gray hat pulled down very low, hiding most of his face. He came around slowly on the left side. Neither spoke.

The driver got out of the car and stood by the side of it, looking down at diem. He was an older man than die odier two. His hair was just beginning to gray and he wore silver-rimmed spectacles that gave him a scholarly look. He had a long creased face and didn't have on any shirt or undershirt. He had on blue jeans that were too tight for him and was holding a black hat and a gun. The two boys also had guns.

"We've had an ACCIDENT!" the children screamed.

The grandmother had the peculiar feeling that the bespectacled man was someone she knew. His face was as familiar to her as if she had known him all her life but she could not recall who he was. He moved away from the car and began to come down the em bankment, placing his feet carefully so that he wouldn't slip. He had on tan and white shoes and no socks, and his ankles were red and thin. "Good afternoon," he said. "I see you all had you a little spill."

"We turned over twicel" said tlie grandmother.

"Oncet," he corrected. "We seen it happen. Try their car and see will it run, Hiram," he said quietly to die boy with die gray hat.

"What you got that gun for?" John Wesley asked. "Whatcha gonna do with that gun?"

"Lady," the man said to the children's modier, "would you mind calling them children to sit down by you? Children make me nervous. I want all you all to sit down right together there where you're at."

"What are you telling US what to do for?" June Star asked. Behind them the line of woods gaped like a dark open mouth. "Come here," said their mother. "Look here now," Bailey began suddenly, "we're in a predicament! We're in . . ." The grandmother shrieked. She scrambled to her feet and stood staring. "You're The Misfit!" she said. "I recognized you at once!"

"Yes'm," the man said, smiling slightly as if he were pleased in spite of himself to be known, "but it would have been better for all of you, lady, if you hadn't of reckernized me."

Bailey turned his head sharply and said something to his mother that shocked even the children. The old lady began to cry and The Misfit reddened.

"Lady," he said, "don't you get upset. Sometimes a man says things he don't mean. I don't reckon he meant to talk to you thataway."

"You wouldn't shoot a lady, would you?" the grandmotiier said and removed a clean handkerchief from her cuff and began to slap at her eyes with it.

The Misfit pointed the toe of his shoe into the ground and made a little hole and then covered it up again. "I would hate to have to," he said.

"Listen," the grandmother almost screamed, "I know you're a good man. You don't look a bit like you have common blood. I know you must come from nice people!"

"Yes mam," he said, "finest people in the world." When he smiled he showed a row of strong white teeth. "God never made a finer woman than my mother and my daddy's heart was pure gold," he said. The boy with the red sweat shirt had come around behind them and was standing with his gun at his hip. The Misfit squatted down on the ground. "Watch them children, Bobby Lee," he said. "You know they make me nervous." He looked at the six of them huddled together in front of him and he seemed to be embarrassed as if he couldn't think of anything to say. "Ain't a cloud in the sky," he remarked, looking up at it. "Don't see no sun but don't see no cloud neither."

"Yes, it's a beautiful day," said the grandmother. "Listen," she said, "you shouldn't call yourself The Misfit because I know you're a good man at heart. I can just look at you and tell."

"HushI" Bailey yelled. "Hush! Everybody shut up and let me handle this!" He

was squatting in the position of a runner about to sprint forward but he didn't move.

"I pre-chate that, lady," The Misfit said and drew a little circle in the ground with the butt of his gun. "It'll take a half a hour to fix this here car," Hiram called, looking over the raised hood of it.

"Well, first you and Bobby Lee get him and that little boy to step over yonder with you," The Misfit said, pointing to Bailey and John Wesley. "The boys want to ast you something," he said to Bailey. "Would you mind stepping back in them woods there with them?"

"Listen," Bailey began, "we're in a terrible predicament! Nobody realizes what this is," and his voice cracked. His eyes were as blue and intense as the parrots in his shirt and he remained perfectly still.

The grandmother reached up to adjust her hat brim as if she were going to the woods with him but it came off in her hand. She stood staring at it and after a second she let it fall on the ground. Hiram pulled Bailey up by the arm as if he were assisting an old man. John Wesley caught hold of his father's hand and Bobby Lee followed. They went off toward the woods and just as they reached the dark edge, Bailey turned and supporting himself against a gray naked pine trunk, he shouted, "I'll be back in a minute, Mamma, wait on me!"

"Come back this instant!" his mother shrilled but they all dis appeared into the woods.

"Bailey Boy!" the grandmother called in a tragic voice but she found she was looking at The Misfit squatting on the ground in front of her. "I just know you're a good man," she said desperately. "You're not a bit common!"

"Nome, I ain't a good man," The Misfit said after a second as if he had considered her statement carefully, "but I ain't the worst in the world neither. My daddy said I was a different breed of dog from my brothers and sisters. 'You know,' Daddy said, 'it's some diat can live dieir whole life out without asking about it and it's others has to know why it is, and this boy is one of the latters. He's going to be into everydiing I'" He put on his black hat and looked up suddenly and dien away deep into die woods as if he were embarrassed again. "I'm sorry I don't have on a shirt before you ladies," he said, hunching his shoulders slightly. "We buried our clodies diat we had on when we escaped and we're just making do until we can get better. We borrowed these from some folks we met," he explained.

"That's perfectly all right," the grandmodier said. "Maybe Bailey has an extra shirt in his suitcase."

"I'll look and see terrectly," The Misfit said.

"Where are diey taking him?" the children's modier screamed.

"Daddy was a card himself," The Misfit said. "You couldn't put anything over on him. He never got in trouble with die Authorities tliough. Just had die knack of handling diem."

"You could be honest too if you'd only try," said die grandmother. "Think how wonderful it would be to settle down and live a comfortable life and not have to think about somebody chasing you all die time."

The Misfit kept scratching in die ground with die butt of his gun as if he were thinking about it. "Yes'm, somebody is always after you," he murmured.

The grandmodier noticed how diin his shoulder blades were just behind his hat because she was standing up looking down on him. "Do you ever pray?" she asked.

He shook his head. All she saw was the black hat wiggle between his shoulder blades. "Nome," he said.

There was a pistol shot from die woods, followed closely by anotlier. Then silence. The old lady's head jerked around. She could hear die wind move dirough die tree tops like a long satisfied insuck of breadi. "Bailey Boyl" she called.

"I was a gospel singer for a while," The Misfit said. "I been most everydiing. Been in die arm service, bodi land and sea, at home and abroad, been twict married, been an undertaker, been widi die railroads, plowed Modier Eartli, been in a tornado, seen a man burnt alive oncet," and looked up at the children's mother and the little girl who were sitting close together, their faces white and tlieir eyes glassy; "1 even seen a woman flogged," he said.

"Pray, pray," the grandmother began, "pray, pray . . ."

"1 never was a bad boy that I remember of," The Misfit said in an almost dreamy voice, "but somewheres along the line I done sometliing wrong and got sent to the penitentiary. I was buried alive," and he looked up and held her attention to him by a steady stare.

"That's when you should have started to pray," she said. "What did you do to get sent to die penitentiary tliat first time?"

"Turn to the right, it was a wall," The Misfit said, looking up again at the cloudless sky. "Turn to the left, it was a wall. Look up it was a ceiling, look down it was a floor. I forget what 1 done, lady. I set there and set there, trying to remember what it was I done and I ain't recalled it to this day. Oncet in a while, 1 would think it was coming to me, but it never come."

"Maybe they put you in by mistake," the old lady said vaguely.

"Nome," he said. "It wasn't no mistake. They had the papers on

me."

"You must have stolen something," she said.

The Misfit sneered slightly. "Nobody had nothing I wanted," he said. "It was a head-doctor at the penitentiary said what I had done was kill my daddy but I known that for a lie. My daddy died in nineteen ought nineteen of the epidemic flu and I never had a thing to do with it. He was buried in the Mount Hopewell Baptist churchyard and you can go there and see for yourself."

"If you would pray," the old lady said, "Jesus would help you."

"That's right," The Misfit said.

"Well then, why don't you pray?" she asked trembling with de light suddenly.

"I don't want no hep," he said. "I'm doing all right by myself."

Bobby Lee and Hiram came ambling back from die woods. Bobby Lee was dragging a yellow shirt with bright blue parrots in it.

"Thow me that shirt, Bobby Lee," The Misfit said. The shirt came flying at him and landed on his shoulder and he put it on. The grandmodier couldn't name what the shirt reminded her of. "No, lady," The Misfit said while he was buttoning it up, "I found out the crime don't matter. You can do one tiling or you can do another, kill a man or take a tire off his car, because sooner or later you're going to forget what it was you done and just be punished for it."

The children's motlier had begun to make heaving noises as if she couldn't get her breath. "Lady," he asked, "would you and that little girl like to step off yonder with Bobby Lee and Hiram and join your husband?"

"Yes, thank you," die motlier said faintly. Her left arm dangled helplessly and she was holding tiie baby, who had gone to sleep, in the other. "Hep that lady up, Hiram," The Misfit said as she struggled to climb out of the ditch, "and Bobby Lee, you hold onto that little girl's hand."

"1 don't want to hold hands with him," June Star said. "He reminds me of a pig."

The fat boy blushed and laughed and caught her by the arm and pulled her off into the woods after Hiram and her mother.

Alone with The Misfit, the grandmodier found that she had lost her voice. There was not a cloud in the sky nor any sun. There was nothing around her but woods. She wanted to tell him that he must pray. She opened and closed her moudi several times before anything came out. Finally she found herself saying, "Jesus, Jesus," meaning, Jesus will help you, but the way she was saying it, it sounded as if she might be cursing.

"Yes'm," The Misfit said as if he agreed. "Jesus thown everything off balance. It was die same case with Him as with me except He hadn't committed any crime and they could prove I had committed one because they had the papers on me. Of course," he said, "they never shown me my papers. That's why 1 sign myself now. 1 said long ago, you get you a signature and sign everything you do and **keep** a copy of it. Then you'll know what you done and you can hold up the crime to the punishment and see do they match and in the **end** you'll have something to prove you ain't been treated right. I call myself The Misfit," he said, "because I can't make what all I **done** wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment."

There was a piercing scream from die woods, followed closely by a pistol report. "Does it seem right to you, lady, that one is punished a heap and another ain't punished at all?"

"Jesus!" the old lady cried. "You've got good blood! I know you wouldn't shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray! Jesus, you ought not to shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got!"

"Lady," The Misfit said, looking beyond her far into the woods, "diere never was a body that give the undertaker a tip."

There were two more pistol reports and the grandmodier raised her head like a parched old turkey hen crying for water and called, "Bailey Boy, Bailey Boy!" as if her heart would break.

"Jesus was the only One diat ever raised the dead." The Misfit continued, "and He shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness," he said and his voice had become almost a snarl.

"Maybe He didn't raise the dead," the old lady mumbled, not knowing what she was saying and feeling so dizzy that she sank down in die ditch with her legs twisted under her.

"I wasn't there so I can't say He didn't," The Misfit said. "I wisht I had of been there," he said, hitting the ground with his fist. "It ain't right I wasn't tiiere because if I had of been there I would of known. Listen lady," he said in a high voice, "if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now." His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw die man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang

back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. Then he put his gun down on the ground and took off his glasses and began to clean them.

Hiram and Bobby Lee returned from die woods and stood over the ditch, looking down at the grandmodier who half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at die cloudless sky.

Widiout his glasses, The Misfit's eyes were red-rimmed and pale and defenseless-looking. "Take her off and throw her where you thrown the others," he said, picking up the cat that was rubbing itself against his leg.

"She was a talker, wasn't she?" Bobby Lee said, sliding down the ditch with a yodel. "She would of been a good woman," The Misfit said, "if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life." "Some fun!" Bobby Lee said. "Shut up, Bobby Lee," The Misfit said. "It's no real pleasure in life."

A Late Encounter with the Enemy

GENERAL SASH was a hundred and four years old. He lived with his granddaughter, Sally Poker Sash, who was sixty-two years old and who prayed every night on her knees that he would live until her graduation from college. The General didn't give two slaps for her graduation but he never doubted he would live for it. Living had got to be such a habit with him that he couldn't conceive of any other condition. A graduation exercise was not exactly his idea of a good time, even if, as she said, he would be expected to sit on the stage in his uniform. She said diere would be a long procession of teachers and students in their robes but that there wouldn't be anything to equal *him* in his uniform. He knew this well enough without her telling him, and as for die damn procession, it could march to hell and back and not cause him a quiver. He liked parades with floats full of Miss Americas and Miss Daytona Beaches and Miss Queen Cotton Products. He didn't have any use for processions and a procession full of schoolteachers was about as deadly as die" River Styx to his way of flunking. However, he was willing to sit on the stage in his uniform so that they could see him. Sally Poker was not as sure as he was diat he would live until her graduation. There had not been any perceptible change in him for the last five years, but she had the sense that she might be cheated out of her triumph because she so often was. She had been going to summer school every year for the past twenty because when she started teaching, there were no such things as degrees. In those times, she said, everything was normal but nothing had been normal since she was sixteen, and for the past twenty summers, when she should have been resting, she had had to take a trunk

in the burning heat to the state teacher's college; and though when she returned in the fall, she always taught in the exact way she had been taught not to teach, this was a mild revenge that didn't satisfy her sense of justice. She wanted the General at her graduation because she wanted to show what she stood for, or, as she said, "what all was behind her," and was not behind them. This *them* was not anybody in particular. It was just all the upstarts who had turned the world on its head and unsettled the ways of decent living.

She meant to stand on that platform in August with the General sitting in his wheel chair on the stage behind her and she meant to hold her head very high as if she were saying, "See him I See him I My kin, all you upstarts! Glorious upright old man standing for the old traditions! Dignity! Honor! Courage! See him!" One night in her sleep she screamed, "See him! See him!" and turned her

head and found him sitting in his wheel chair behind her with a terrible expression on his face and with all his clothes off except the general's hat and she had waked up and had not dared to go back to sleep again that night.

For his part, the General would not have consented even to attend her graduation if she had not promised to see to it that he sit on the stage. He liked to sit on any stage. He considered that he was still a very handsome man. When he had been able to stand up, he had measured five feet four inches of pure game cock. He had white hair that reached to his shoulders behind and he would **not** wear teeth because he thought his profile was more striking without them. When he put on his full-dress general's uniform, he **knew** well enough diat there was nothing to match him anywhere.

This was not the same uniform he had worn in the War between **the** States. He had not actually been a general in that war. He **had** probably been a foot soldier; he didn't remember what he **had** been; in fact, he didn't remember that war at all. It was like his feet, which hung down now shriveled at the very end of him, without feeling, covered with a blue-gray afghan diat Sally Poker **had** crocheted when she was a little girl. He didn't remember the Spanish-American War in which he had lost a son; he didn't even **remember** the son. He didn't have any use for history because he never expected to meet it again. To his mind, history was connected with processions and life with parades and he liked parades. People were always asking him if he remembered this or that— a dreary black procession of questions about die past. There was only one event in the past that had any significance for him and that he cared to talk about: that was twelve years ago when he had received the general's uniform and had been in the premiere.

"I was in that preemy they had in Atlanta," he would tell visitors sitting on his front porch. "Surrounded by beautiful guls. It wasn't a thing local about it. It was nothing local about it. Listen here. It was a nashnul event and they had me in it —up onto the stage. There was no bob-tails at it. Every person at it had paid ten dollars to get in and had to wear his tuxseeder. I was in this uniform. A beautiful gul presented me with it that afternoon in a hotel room."

"It was in a suite in the hotel and I was in it too, Papa," Sally Poker would say, winking at the visitors. "You weren't alone witfi any young lady in a hotel room."

"Was, I'd a known what to do," the old General would say with a sharp look and the visitors would scream with laughter. "This was a Hollywood, California, gul," he'd continue. "She was from Hollywood, California, and didn't have any part in the pitcher. Out diere they have so many beautiful guls diat they don't

need that they call them a extra and they don't use them for nodiing but presenting people with things and having their pitchers taken. They took my pitcher with her. No, it was two of them. One on either side and me in the middle with my arms around each of them's waist and their waist ain't any bigger than a half a dollar."

Sally Poker would interrupt again. "It was Mr. Govisky diat gave you the uniform, Papa, and he gave me the most exquisite corsage. Really, I wish you could have seen it. It was made widi gladiola petals taken off and painted gold and put back together to look like a rose. It was exquisite. I wish you could have seen it, it was . . ."

"It was as big as her head," the General would snarl. "I was tellin it. They gimme this uniform and they gimme this soward and they say, 'Now General, we don't want you to start a war on us. All we want you to do is march right up on that stage when you're innerduced tonight and answer a few questions. Think you can do that?' 'Think I can do it I' I say. 'Listen here. I was doing things before you were born,' and they hollered."

"He was the hit of the show," Sally Poker would say, but she didn't much like to remember the premiere on account of what had happened to her feet at it. She had bought a new dress for the occasion—a long black crepe dinner dress with a rhinestone buckle and a bolero—and a pair of silver slippers to wear with it, because she was supposed to go up on the stage with him to keep him from falling. Everything was arranged for them. A real limousine came at ten minutes to eight and took them to the theater. It drew up under the marquee at exactly the right time, after the big stars and the director and the author and the governor and die mayor and some less important stars. The police kept traffic from jamming and there were ropes to keep the people off who couldn't go. All the people who couldn't go watched them step out of the limousine into the lights. Then they walked down the red and gold foyer and an usherette in a Confederate cap and little short skirt conducted tliem to their special seats. The audience was already there and a group of UDC members began to clap when they saw the General in his uniform and that started everybody to clap. A few more celebrities came after them and then the doors closed and the lights went down.

A young man with blond wavy hair who said he represented the motion-picture industry came out and began to introduce everybody and each one who was introduced walked up on the stage and said how really happy he was to be here for this great event. The General **and** his granddaughter were introduced sixteenth on the program. He was introduced as General Tennessee Flintrock

Sash of the Confederacy, though Sally Poker had told Mr. Govisky that his name was George Poker Sash and that he had only been a major. She helped him up from his seat but her heart was beating so fast she **didn't** know whether she'd make it herself.

The old man walked up the aisle slowly with his fierce white head **high** and his hat held over his heart. The orchestra began to play **the** Confederate Battle Hymn very softly and the UDC members **rose** as a group and did not sit down again until the General was on the stage. When he reached die center of die stage with Sally Poker just behind him guiding his elbow, die orchestra burst out in a loud rendition of die Battle Hymn and the old man, widi real stage presence, gave a vigorous trembling salute and stood at attention until the last blast had died away. Two of die usherettes in Confederate caps and short skirts held a Confederate and a Union flag crossed behind diem.

The General stood in die exact center of the spotlight and it caught a weird moon-shaped slice of Sally Poker—die corsage, die rhinestone buckle and one hand clenched around a white glove and handkerchief. The young man with the blond wavy hair inserted himself into the circle of light and said he was *really* happy to have here tonight for diis great event, one, he said, who had fought and bled in the battles they would soon see daringly reacted on the screen, and "Tell me, General," he asked, "how old are you?"

"Niiiiiinnttty-two!" the General screamed.

The young man looked as if this were just about die most impressive thing that had been said all evening. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "let's give the General the biggest hand we've got!" and there was applause immediately and die young man indicated to Sally Poker with a motion of his thumb diat she could take die old man back to his seat now so diat the next person could be introduced; but the General had not finished. He stood immovable in the exact center of the spotlight, his neck thrust forward, his mouth slightly open, and his voracious gray eyes drinking in die glare and the applause. He elbowed his granddaughter roughly away. "How I keep so young," he screeched, "I kiss all the pretty guls!"

This was met with a great din of spontaneous applause and it was at just diat instant diat Sally Poker looked down at her feet and discovered that in the excitement of getting ready she had forgot ten to change her shoes: two brown Girl Scout oxfords protruded from the bottom of her dress. She gave the General a yank and almost ran with him off the stage. He was very angry that he had not got to say how glad he was to be here for this event and on die way back to his seat, he kept saying as loud as he could, "I'm glad to be here

at diis preemy with all diese beautiful gulsl" but there was another celebrity going up the odier aisle and nobody paid any attention to him. He slept through the picture, muttering fiercely every now and then in his sleep.

Since then, his life had not been very interesting. His feet were completely dead now, his knees worked like old hinges, his kidneys functioned when they would, but his heart persisted doggedly to beat. The past and the future were the same tiling to him, one forgotten and the other not remembered; he had no more notion of dying dian a cat. Every year on Confederate Memorial Day, he was bundled up and lent to the Capitol City Museum where he was displayed from one to four in a musty room full of old photographs, old uniforms, old artillery, and historic documents. All diese were carefully preserved in glass cases so that children would not put their hands on them. He wore his general's uniform from die premiere and sat, with a fixed scowl, inside a small roped area. There was nothing about him to indicate that he was alive except an occasional movement in his milky gray eyes, but once when a bold child touched his sword, his arm shot forward and slapped die hand off in an instant. In the spring when the old homes were opened for pilgrimages, he was invited to wear his uniform and sit in some conspicuous spot and lend atmosphere to the scene. Some of tliese times he only snarled at the visitors but sometimes he told about the premiere and the beautiful girls.

If he had died before Sally Poker's graduation, she thought she would have died herself. At die beginning of the summer term, even before she knew if she would pass, she told the Dean that her grandfather, General Tennessee Flintrock Sash of the Confederacy, would attend her graduation and that he was a hundred and four years old and that his mind was still clear as a bell. Distinguished visitors were always welcome and could sit on the stage and be introduced. She made arrangements with her nephew, John Wesley Poker Sash, a Boy Scout, to come wheel the General's chair. She diought how sweet it would be to see the old man in his courageous gray and die young boy in his clean khaki—the old and the new, she thought appropriately—diey would be behind her on the stage when she received her degree.

Everything went almost exactly as she had planned. In the summer while she was away at school, die General stayed witii otiier relatives and they brought him and John Wesley, the Boy Scout, down to the graduation. A reporter came to die hotel where diey stayed and took the General's picture with Sally Poker on one side of him and John Wesley on the otJier. The General, who had had his picture taken with beautiful girls, didn't diink much of this. He had forgotten precisely what kind of event this was he was going to attend but he remembered diat he was to wear his uniform and carry the sword.

On the morning of the graduation, Sally Poker had to line up in the academic procession with the B.S.'s in Elementary Education and she couldn't see to getting him on the stage herself—but John Wesley, a fat blond boy of ten widi an executive expression, guaranteed to take care of everything. She came in her academic gown to the hotel and dressed die old man in his uniform. He was as frail as a dried spider. "Aren't you just dirilled, Papa?" she asked. "I'm just thrilled to death!"

"Put the soward acrost my lap, damm you," die old man said, "where it'll shine."

She put it there and then stood back looking at him. "You look just grand," she said.

"God damm it," die old man said in a slow monotonous certain tone as if he were saying it to die beating of his heart. "God damm every goddam thing to hell."

"Now, now," she said and left happily to join the procession.

The graduates were lined up behind the Science building and she found her place just as die line started to move. She had not slept much the night before and when she had, she had dreamed of die exercises, murmuring, "See him, see him?" in her sleep but waking up every time just before she turned her head to look at him behind her. The graduates had to walk diree blocks in die hot sun in their black wool robes and as she plodded stolidly along she thought that if anyone considered diis academic procession something impressive to behold, they need only wait until they saw that old General in his courageous gray and diat clean young Boy Scout stoutly wheeling his chair across the stage widi die sunlight catching die sword. She imagined that John Wesley had the old man ready now behind the stage.

The black procession wound its way up the two blocks and started on die main walk leading to the auditorium. The visitors stood on die grass, picking out their graduates. Men were pushing back their hats and wiping dieir foreheads and women were lifting dieir dresses slightly from the shoulders to keep them from sticking to their backs. The graduates in their heavy robes looked as if the last beads of ignorance were being sweated out of them. The sun blazed off die fenders of automobiles and beat from the columns of the buildings and pulled the eye from one spot of glare to another. It pulled Sally Poker's toward the big red Coca-Cola machine that had been set up by the side of the auditorium. Here she saw the General parked, scowling and hatless in his chair in the blazing sun while John Wesley, his blouse loose behind, his hip and cheek pressed to the red machine, was drinking a Coca-Cola. She broke from die line and galloped to them and snatched the bottle away. She shook the boy and thrust in his blouse

and put the hat on the old man's head. "Now get him in there!" she said, pointing one rigid finger to the side door of the building.

For his part die General felt as if there were a little hole beginning to widen in the top of his head. The boy wheeled him rapidly down a walk and up a ramp and into a building and bumped him over the stage entrance and into position where he had been told and the General glared in front of him at heads that all seemed to flow togedier and eyes that moved from one face to another. Several figures in black robes came and picked up his hand and shook it. A black procession was flowing up each aisle and forming to stately music in a pool in front of him. The music seemed to be entering his head through die little hole and he thought for a second that the procession would try to enter it too.

He didn't know what procession this was but diere was sometiiing familiar about it. It must be familiar to him since it had come to meet him, but he didn't like a black procession. Any procession tiiat came to meet him, he thought irritably, ought to have floats widi beautiful guls on diem like the floats before the preemy. It must be somediing connected with history like they were always having. He had no use for any of it. What happened then wasn't anything to a man living now and he was living now.

When all the procession had flowed into the black pool, a black figure began orating in front of it. The figure was telling something about history and the General made up his mind he wouldn't listen, but the words kept seeping in through the little hole in his head. He heard his own name mentioned and his chair was shuttled forward roughly and the Boy Scout took a big bow. They called his name and die fat brat bowed. Goddam you, die old man tried to say, get out of my way, I can stand upl—but he was jerked back again before he could get up and take the bow. He supposed the noise they made was for him. If he was over, he didn't intend to listen to any more of it. If it hadn't been for the little hole in the top of his head, none of the words would have got to him. He thought of putting his finger up there into die hole to block diem but die hole was a little wider than his finger and it felt as if it were getting deeper.

Another black robe had taken the place of die first one and was talking now and he heard his name mentioned again but tliey were not talking about him, they were still talking about history. "If we forget our past," the speaker was saying, "we won't remember our future and it will be as well for we won't have one." The General heard some of these words gradually. He had forgotten history and he didn't intend to remember it again. He had forgotten the name and face of his wife and the names and faces of his children or even if he had a wife and children, and he had forgotten the names of places and the places themselves and what had happened at them.

He was considerably irked by die hole in his head. He had not expected to have a hole in his head at this event. It was die slow black music diat had put it tnere and tliough most of die music had stopped outside, there was still a little of it in die hole, going deeper and moving around in his dioughts, letting die words he heard into the dark places of his brain. He heard die words, Chickamauga, Shiloh, Johnston, Lee, and he knew he was inspiring all diese words that meant nodiing to him. He wondered if he had been a general at Chickamauga or at Lee. Then he tried to see himself and the horse mounted in die middle of a float full of beautiful girls, being driven slowly through downtown Atlanta. Instead, the old words began to stir in his head as if they were trying to wrench diemselves out of place and come to life.

The speaker was through with that war and had gone on to the next one and now he was approaching another and all his words, like die black procession, were vaguely familiar and irritating. There was a long finger of music in the General's head, probing various spots that were words, letting in a little light on die words and helping them to live. The words began to come toward him and he said, Dammit I I ain't going to have it I and he started edging backwards to get out of the way. Then he saw die figure in the black robe sit down and there was a noise and the black pool in front of him began to rumble and to flow toward him from either side to the black slow music, and he said, Stop dammit! I can't do but one thing at a time I He couldn't protect himself from the words and attend to the procession too and the words were coming at him fast. He felt that he was running backwards and die words were coming at him like musket fire, just escaping him but getting nearer and nearer. He turned around and began to run as fast as he could but he found himself running toward the words. He was running into a regular volley of diem and meeting them with quick curses. As the music swelled toward him, the entire past opened up on him out of nowhere and he felt his body riddled in a hundred places with sharp stabs of pain and he fell down, returning a curse for every hit. He saw his wife's narrow face looking at him critically through her round gold-rimmed glasses; he saw one of his squinting bald-headed sons; and his mother ran toward him with an anxious look; dien a succession of places—Chickamauga, Shiloh, Mardiasville—rushed at him as if die past were the only future now and he had to endure it. Then suddenly he saw diat die black procession was almost on him. He recognized it, for it had been dogging all his days. He made such a desperate effort to see over it and find out what comes after die past diat his hand clenched the sword until die blade touched bone.

The graduates were crossing the stage in a long file to receive dieir scrolls and shake the president's hand. As Sally Poker, who was near the end, crossed, she glanced at die General and saw him sitting fixed and fierce, his eyes wide open, and she turned her head forward again and held it a perceptible degree higher and received her scroll. Once it was all over and she was out of die auditorium in die sun again, she located her kin and they waited togedier on a bench in the shade for John Wesley to wheel die old man out. That crafty scout had bumped him out die back way and rolled him at high speed down a flagstone path and was waiting now, widi die corpse, in die long line at die Coca-Cola machine.

The Life You Save May Be Your Own

THE old woman and her daughter were sitting on their porch when Mr. Shiftlet came up their road for the first time. The old woman slid to the edge of her chair and leaned forward, shading her eyes from die piercing sunset with her hand. The daughter could not see far in front of her and continued to play with her fingers. Although the old woman lived in this desolate spot with only her daughter and she had never seen Mr. Shiftlet before, she could tell, even from a distance, that he was a tramp and no one to be afraid of. His left coat sleeve was folded up to show diere was only half an arm in it and his gaunt figure listed slightly to the side as if the breeze were pushing him. He had on a black town suit and a brown felt hat that was turned up in the front and down in the back and he carried a tin tool box by a handle. He came on, at an amble, up her road, his face turned toward the sun which appeared to be balancing itself on the peak of a small mountain. The old woman didn't change her position until he was almost into her yard; then she rose with one hand fisted on her hip. The daughter, a large girl in a short blue organdy dress, saw him all at once and jumped up and began to stamp and point and make excited speechless sounds. Mr. Shiftlet stopped just inside the yard and set his box on the ground and tipped his hat at her as if she were not in the least afflicted; then he turned toward the old woman and swung the hat all the way off. He had long black slick hair that hung flat from

a part in die middle to beyond the tips of his ears on eidier side. His face descended in forehead for more than half its length and ended suddenly with his features just balanced over a jutting steel-trap jaw. He seemed to be a young man but he had a look of composed dissatisfaction as if he understood life thoroughly.

"Good evening," the old woman said. She was about the size of a cedar fence post and she had a man's gray hat pulled down low over her head.

The tramp stood looking at her and didn't answer. He turned his back and faced the sunset. He swung both his whole and his short arm up slowly so that they indicated an expanse of sky and his figure formed a crooked cross. The old woman watched him with her arms folded across her chest as if she were the owner of the sun, and the daughter watched, her head thrust forward and her fat helpless hands hanging at die wrists. She had long pink-gold hair and eyes as blue as a peacock's neck.

He held the pose for almost fifty seconds and then he picked up his box and came on to die porch and dropped down on the

bottom step. "Lady," he said in a firm nasal voice, "I'd give a fortune to live where I could see me a sun do that every evening."

"Does it every evening," the old woman said and sat back down.

The daughter sat down too and watched him with a cautious sly look as if he were a bird that had come up very close. He leaned to one side, rooting in his pants pocket, and in a second he brought out a package of chewing gum and offered her a piece. She took it and unpeeled it and began to chew without taking her eyes off him.

He offered die old woman a piece but she only raised her upper lip to indicate she had no teeth.

Mr. Shiftlet's pale sharp glance had already passed over every thing in the yard—the pump near the corner of the house and die big fig tree that three or four chickens were preparing to roost in —and had moved to a shed where he saw the square rusted back of an automobile. "You ladies drive?" he asked.

"That car ain't run in fifteen year," the old woman said. "The day my husband died, it quit running."

"Nothing is like it used to be, lady," he said. "The world is al most rotten."

"That's right," die old woman said. "You from around here?"

"Name Tom T. Shiftlet," he murmured, looking at the tires.

"I'm pleased to meet you," the old woman said. "Name Lucynell Crater and daughter Lucynell Crater. What you doing around here, Mr. Shiftlet?"

He judged the car to be about a 1928 or '29 Ford. "Lady," he said, and turned and gave her his full attention, "lemme tell you something. There's one of these doctors in Atlanta that's taken a knife and cut the human heart—the human heart," he repeated, leaning forward, "out of a man's chest and held it in his hand," and he held his hand out, palm up, as if it were slightly weighted with die human heart, "and studied it like it was a day-old chicken, and lady," he said, allowing a long significant pause in which his head slid forward and his clay-colored eyes brightened, "he don't know no more about it than you or me."

"That's right," the old woman said.

"Why, if he was to take that knife and cut into every corner of it, he still wouldn't know no more than you or me. What you want to bet?"

"Nothing," the old woman said wisely. "Where you come from, Mr. Shiftlet?"

He didn't answer. He reached into his pocket and brought out a sack of tobacco and a package of cigarette papers and rolled himself a cigarette, expertly with one hand, and attached it in a hanging position to his upper lip. Then he took a box of wooden matches from his pocket and struck one on his shoe. He

held the burning match as if he were studying the mystery of flame while it traveled dangerously toward his skin. The daughter began to make loud noises and to point to his hand and shake her finger at him, but when the flame was just before touching him, he leaned down with his hand cupped over it as if he were going to set fire to his nose and lit the cigarette.

He flipped away the dead match and blew a stream of gray into the evening. A sly look came over his face. "Lady," he said, "nowadays, people'll do anything anyways. I can tell you my name is Tom T. Shiftlet and I come from Tarwater, Tennessee, but you never have seen me before: how you know I ain't lying? How you know my name ain't Aaron Sparks, lady, and I come from Singleberry, Georgia, or how you know it's not George Speeds and I come from Lucy, Alabama, or how you know I ain't Thompson Bright from Toolafalls, Mississippi?" "I don't know nothing about you," the old woman muttered, irked.

"Lady," he said, "people don't care how they lie. Maybe the best I can tell you is, I'm a man; but listen lady," he said and paused and made his tone more ominous still, "what is a man?"

The old woman began to gum a seed. "What you carry in that tin box, Mr. Shiftlet?" she asked. "Tools," he said, put back. "I'm a carpenter."

"Well, if you come out here to work, I'll be able to feed you and give you a place to sleep but I can't pay. I'll tell you that before you begin," she said.

There was no answer at once and no particular expression on his face. He leaned back against the two-by-four that helped support the porch roof. "Lady," he said slowly, "there's some men that some things mean more to them than money." The old woman rocked without comment and the daughter watched the trigger that moved up and down in his neck. He told the old woman then that all most people were interested in was money, but he asked what a man was made for. He asked her if a man was made for money, or what. He asked her what she thought she was made for but she didn't answer, she only sat rocking and wondered if a one-armed man could put a new roof on her garden house. He asked a lot of questions that she didn't answer. He told her that he was twenty-eight years old and had lived a varied life. He had-been a gospel singer, a foreman on the railroad, an assistant in an undertaking parlor, and he come over the radio for three months with Uncle Roy and his Red Creek Wranglers. He said he had fought and bled in the Arm Service of his country and visited every foreign land and that everywhere he had seen people that didn't care if they did a thing one way or another. He said he hadn't been raised thataway.

A fat yellow moon appeared in the branches of the fig tree as if it were going to roost there with the chickens. He said that a man had to escape to the country to see the world whole and that he wished he lived in a desolate place like this where he could see the sun go down every evening like God made it to do.

"Are you married or are you single?" the old woman asked.

There was a long silence. "Lady," he asked finally, "where would you find you an innocent woman today? I wouldn't have any of this trash I could just pick up."

The daughter was leaning very far down, hanging her head almost between her knees watching him through a triangular door she had made in her overturned hair; and she suddenly fell in a heap on the floor and began to whimper. Mr. Shiftlet straightened her out and helped her get back in the chair.

"Is she your baby girl?" he asked.

"My only," the old woman said "and she's the sweetest girl in the world. I would give her up for nothing on earth. She's smart too. She can sweep the floor, cook, wash, feed the chickens, and hoe. I wouldn't give her up for a casket of jewels."

"No," he said kindly, "don't ever let any man take her away from

it

you. "Any man come after her," the old woman said, " '11 have to stay around the place."

Mr. Shiftlet's eye in the darkness was focused on a part of the automobile bumper that glittered in the distance. "Lady," he said, jerking his short arm up as if he could point with it to her house and yard and pump, "there ain't a broken thing on this plantation that I couldn't fix for you, one-arm jackleg or not. I'm a man," he said with a sullen dignity, "even if I ain't a whole one. I got," he said, tapping his knuckles on the floor to emphasize the immensity of what he was going to say, "a moral intelligence!" and his face pierced out of the darkness into a shaft of doorlight and he stared at her as if he were astonished himself at this impossible truth.

The old woman was not impressed with the phrase. "I told you you could hang around and work for food," she said, "if you don't mind sleeping in that car yonder."

"Why listen, lady," he said with a grin of delight, "the monks of old slept in their coffins!" "They wasn't as advanced as we are," the old woman said.

The next morning he began on the roof of the garden house while Lucynell, the daughter, sat on a rock and watched him work.

He had not been around a week before the change he had made in the place was

apparent. He had patched the front and back steps, built a new hog pen, restored a fence, and taught Lucynell, who was completely deaf and had never said a word in her life, to say the word "bird." The big rosy-faced girl followed him everywhere, saying "Burrttddt ddbirrrttdt," and clapping her hands. The old woman watched from a distance, secretly pleased. She was ravenous for a son-in-law.

Mr. Shiftlet slept on the hard narrow back seat of the car with his feet out the side window. He had his razor and a can of water on a crate that served him as a bedside table and he put up a piece of mirror against the back glass and kept his coat neatly on a hanger that he hung over one of the windows.

In the evenings he sat on the steps and talked while the old woman and Lucynell rocked violently in their chairs on either side of him. The old woman's three mountains were black against the dark blue sky and were visited off and on by various planets and by the moon after it had left the chickens. Mr. Shiftlet pointed out that the reason he had improved this plantation was because he had taken a personal interest in it. He said he was even going to make the automobile run.

He had raised the hood and studied the mechanism and he said

> he could tell that the car had been built in the days when cars were really built. You take now, he said, one man puts in one bolt and another man puts in another bolt and another man puts in another bolt so that it's a man for a bolt. That's why you have to pay so much for a car: you're paying all those men. Now if you didn't have to pay but one man, you could get you a cheaper car and one that had had a personal interest taken in it, and it would be a better car.

The old woman agreed with him that this was so.

Mr. Shiftlet said that the trouble with the world was that nobody

> cared, or stopped and took any trouble. He said he never would have been able to teach Lucynell to say a word if he hadn't cared

and stopped long enough.

"Teach her to say something else," the old woman said.

"What you want her to say next?" Mr. Shiftlet asked.

The old woman's smile was broad and toothless and suggestive.

"Teach her to say 'sugarpie,'" she said.

Mr. Shiftlet already knew what was on her mind.

The next day he began to tinker with the automobile and that evening he told her that if she would buy a fan belt, he would be able to make the car run.

The old woman said she would give him the money. "You see that girl yonder?" she asked, pointing to Lucynell who was sitting on the floor a foot

away, watching him, her eyes blue even in the dark. "If it was ever a man wanted to take her away, I would say, 'No man on earth is going to take that sweet girl of mine away from me I' but if he was to say, 'Lady, I don't want to take her away, I want her right here,' I would say, 'Mister, I don't blame you none. I wouldn't pass up a chance to live in a permanent place and get the sweetest girl in the world myself. You ain't no fool,' I would say."

"How old is she?" Mr. Shiftlet asked casually. "Fifteen, sixteen," the old woman said. The girl was nearly thirty but because of her innocence it was impossible to guess. "It would be a good idea to paint it too," Mr. Shiftlet remarked. "You don't want it to rust out."

"We'll see about that later," the old woman said.

The next day he walked into town and returned with the parts he needed and a can of gasoline. Late in the afternoon, terrible noises issued from the shed and the old woman rushed out of the house, thinking Lucynell was somewhere having a fit. Lucynell was sitting on a chicken crate, stamping her feet and screaming, "Burrddtttl bddurrddtttt!" but her fuss was drowned out by the car. With a volley of blasts it emerged from the shed, moving in a fierce and stately way. Mr. Shiftlet was in the driver's seat, sitting very erect. He had an expression of serious modesty on his face as if he had just raised the dead.

That night, rocking on the porch, the old woman began her business, at once. "You want you an innocent woman, don't you?" she asked sympathetically. "You don't want none of this trash."

"No'm, I don't," Mr. Shiftlet said.

"One that can't talk," she continued, "can't sass you back or use **foul** language. That's the kind for you to have. Right there," and **she** pointed to Lucynell sitting cross-legged in her chair, holding both feet in her hands.

"That's right," he admitted. "She wouldn't give me any trouble."

"Saturday," the old woman said, "you and her and me can drive into town and get married."

Mr. Shiftlet eased his position on the steps.

"I can't get married right now," he said. "Everything you want to do takes money and I ain't got any."

"What you need with money?" she asked.

"It takes money," he said. "Some people'll do anything anyhow these days, but the way I think, I wouldn't marry no woman that I couldn't take on a trip like she was somebody. I mean take her to a hotel and treat her. I wouldn't marry the Duchesser Windsor," he said firmly, "unless I could take her to a hotel and giver something good to eat.

"I was raised thataway and there ain't a thing I can do about it. My old mother taught me how to do."

"Lucynell don't even know what a hotel is," the old woman muttered. "Listen here, Mr. Shiftlet," she said, sliding forward in her chair, "you'd be getting a permanent house and a deep well and the most innocent girl in the world. You don't need no money. Lemme tell you something: there ain't any place in the world for a poor disabled friendless drifting man."

The ugly words settled in Mr. Shiftlet's head like a group of buzzards in the top of a tree. He didn't answer at once. He rolled himself a cigarette and lit it and then he said in an even voice, "Lady, a man is divided into two parts, body and spirit."

The old woman clamped her gums together.

"A body and a spirit," he repeated. "The body, lady, is like a house: it don't go anywhere; but the spirit, lady, is like a automobile: always on the move, always . . ."

"Listen, Mr. Shiftlet," she said, "my well never goes dry and my house is always warm in the winter and there's no mortgage on a thing about this place. You can go to the courthouse and see foi yourself. And yonder under that shed is a fine automobile." She laid the bait carefully. "You can have it painted by Saturday. I'll pay for the paint."

In the darkness, Mr. Shiftlet's smile stretched like a weary snake waking up by a fire. After a second he recalled himself and said, "I'm only saying a man's spirit means more to him than anything else. I would have to take my wife off for the weekend without no regards at all for cost. I got to follow where my spirit says to go."

"I'll give you fifteen dollars for a weekend trip," the old woman said in a crabbed voice. "That's the best I can do." "That wouldn't hardly pay for more than the gas and the hotel," he said. "It wouldn't feed her." "Seventeen-fifty," the old woman said. "That's all I got so it isn't any use you trying to milk me. You can take a lunch."

Mr. Shiftlet was deeply hurt by the word "milk." He didn't doubt that she had more money sewed up in her mattress but he had already told her he was not interested in her money. "I'll make that do," he said and rose and walked off without treating with her further.

On Saturday the three of them drove into town in the car that the paint had barely dried on and Mr. Shiftlet and Lucynell were married in the Ordinary's office while the old woman witnessed. As they came out of the courthouse, Mr.

Shiftlet began twisting his neck in his collar. He looked morose and bitter as if he had been insulted while someone held him. "That didn't satisfy me none," he said. "That was just something a woman in an office did, nothing but paper work and blood tests. What do they know about my blood? If they was to take my heart and cut it out," he said, "they wouldn't know a thing about me. It didn't satisfy me at all."

"It satisfied the law," the old woman said sharply. "The law," Mr. Shiftlet said and spit. "It's the law that don't satisfy me."

He had painted the car dark green with a yellow band around it just under the windows. The three of them climbed in the front seat and the old woman said, "Don't Lucynell look pretty? Looks like a baby doll." Lucynell was dressed up in a white dress that her mother had uprooted from a trunk and there was a Panama hat on her head with a bunch of red wooden cherries on the brim. Every now and then her placid expression was changed by a sly isolated little thought like a shoot of green in the desert. "You got a prize!" the old woman said.

Mr. Shiftlet didn't even look at her.

They drove back to die house to let die old woman off and pick up die lunch. When diey were ready to leave, she stood staring in die window of die car, widi her fingers clenched around die glass. Tears began to seep sideways out of her eyes and run along die dirty creases in her face. "I ain't ever been parted widi her for two days before," she said.

Mr. Shiftlet started die motor.

"And I wouldn't let no man have her but you because I seen you would do right. Good-by, Sugarbaby," she said, clutching at die sleeve of die white dress. Lucynell looked straight at her and didn't seem to see her diere at all. Mr. Shiftlet eased die car forward so diat she had to move her hands.

The early afternoon was clear and open and surrounded by pale blue sky. Aldiough die car would go only diirty miles an hour, Mr. Shiftlet imagined a terrific climb and dip and swerve diat went entirely to his head so diat he forgot his morning bitterness. He had always wanted an automobile but he had never been able to afford one before. He drove very fast because he wanted to make Mobile by nightfall.

Occasionally he stopped his dioughts long enough to look at Lucynell in die seat beside him. She had eaten die lunch as soon as diey were out of die yard and now she was pulling die cherries off the hat one by one and throwing them out die window. He became depressed in spite of the car. He had driven about a hundred miles when he decided diat she must be hungry again and at the next small town diey came to, he stopped in front of an aluminum-painted eating

place called The Hot Spot and took her in and ordered her a plate of ham and grits. The ride had made her sleepy and as soon as she got up on the stool, she rested her head on die counter and shut her eyes. There was no one in The Hot Spot but Mr. Shiftlet and die boy behind die counter, a pale youdi widi a greasy rag hung over his shoulder. Before he could dish up die food, she was snoring gently.

"Give it to her when she wakes up," Mr. Shiftlet said. "I'll pay for it now."

The boy bent over her and stared at die long pink-gold hair and die half-shut sleeping eyes. Then he looked up and stared at Mr. Shiftlet. "She looks like an angel of Gawd," he murmured.

"Hitchhiker," Mr. Shiftlet explained. "I can't wait. I got to make Tuscaloosa."

The boy bent over again and very carefully touched his finger to a strand of the golden hair and Mr. Shiftlet left.

He was more depressed than ever as he drove on by himself. The late afternoon had grown hot and sultry and the country had flattened out. Deep in the sky a storm was preparing very slowly and without thunder as if it meant to drain every drop of air from the earth before it broke. There were times when Mr. Shiftlet preferred not to be alone. He felt too that a man with a car had a responsibility to others and he kept his eye out for a hitchhiker. Occasionally he saw a sign that warned: "Drive carefully. The life you save may be your own."

The narrow road dropped off on either side into dry fields and here and there a shack or a filling station stood in a clearing. The sun began to set directly in front of the automobile. It was a reddening ball that through his windshield was slightly flat on the bottom and top. He saw a boy in overalls and a gray hat standing on the edge of the road and he slowed the car down and stopped in front of him. The boy didn't have his hand raised to thumb the ride, he was only standing there, but he had a small cardboard suitcase and his hat was set on his head in a way to indicate that he had left somewhere for good. "Son," Mr. Shiftlet said, "I see you want a ride."

The boy didn't say he did or he didn't but he opened the door of the car and got in, and Mr. Shiftlet started driving again. The child held the suitcase on his lap and folded his arms on top of it. He turned his head and looked out the window away from Mr. Shiftlet. Mr. Shiftlet felt oppressed. "Son," he said after a minute, "I got the best old mother in the world so I reckon you only got the second best."

The boy gave him a quick dark glance and then turned his face back out the window.

"It's nothing so sweet," Mr. Shiftlet continued, "as a boy's mother. She taught him his first prayers at her knee, she give him love when no other would, she told him what was right and what wasn't, and she seen that he done the right thing. Son," he said, "I never rued a day in my life like the one I rued when I left that old mother of mine."

The boy shifted in his seat but he didn't look at Mr. Shiftlet. He unfolded his arms and put one hand on the door handle.

"My mother was a angel of Gawd," Mr. Shiftlet said in a very strained voice. "He took her from heaven and giver to me and I left her." His eyes were instantly clouded over with a mist of tears. The car was barely moving.

The boy turned angrily in the seat. "You go to the devil!" he cried. "My old woman is a flea bag and yours is a stinking pole cat!" and with that he flung the door open and jumped out with his suitcase into the ditch.

Mr. Shiftlet was so shocked that for about a hundred feet he drove along slowly with the door still open. A cloud, the exact color of the boy's hat and shaped like a turnip, had descended over the sun, and another, worse looking, crouched behind the car. Mr. Shifdet felt that the rottenness of the world was about to engulf him. He raised his arm and let it fall again to his breast. "Oh Lord!" he prayed. "Break forth and wash the slime from this earth!"

The turnip continued slowly to descend. After a few minutes there was a guffawing peal of thunder from behind and fantastic raindrops, like tin-can tops, crashed over the rear of Mr. Shiftlet's car. Very quickly he stepped on the gas and with his stump sticking out the window he raced tiie galloping shower into Mobile.

The River

THE child stood glum and limp in the middle of the dark living room while his father pulled him into a plaid coat. His right arm was hung in the sleeve but the father buttoned the coat anyway and pushed him forward toward a pale spotted hand that stuck through the half-open door. "He ain't fixed right," a loud voice said from the hall. "Well then for Christ's sake fix him," the father muttered. "It's six o'clock in the morning." He was in his bathrobe and barefooted. When he got die child to the door and tried to shut it, he found her looming in it, a speckled skeleton in a long pea-green coat and felt helmet. "And his and my carfare," she said. "It'll be twict we have to ride the car." He went in the bedroom again to get the money and when he came back, she and die boy were both standing in the middle of die room. She was taking stock. "I couldn't smell those dead cigarette butts long if I was ever to come sit with you," she said, shaking him down in his coat. "Here's die change," the father said. He went to the door and opened it wide and waited. After she had counted die money she slipped it somewhere inside her coat and walked over to a watercolor hanging near the phonograph. "I know what time it is," she said, peering closely at the black lines crossing into broken planes of violent color. "I ought to. My shift goes on at 10 P.M. and don't get off till 5 and it takes me one hour to ride the Vine Street car." "Oh, I see," he said. "Well, we'll expect him back tonight, about eight or nine?" "Maybe later," she said. "We're going to the river to a healing.

This particular preacher don't get around this way often. I wouldn't have paid for that," she said, nodding at the painting, "I would have drew it myself."

"All right, Mrs. Connin, we'll see you then," he said drumming on the door. A toneless voice called from the bedroom, "Bring me an icepack." "Too bad his mamma's sick," Mrs. Connin said. "What's her trouble?" "We don't know," he muttered. "We'll ask the preacher to pray for her. He's healed a lot of folks. The Reverend Bevel Summers. Maybe she ought to see him sometime." "Maybe so," he said. "We'll see you tonight," and he disappeared into the bedroom and left them to go.

The little boy stared at her silently, his nose and eyes running. He was four or five. He had a long face and bulging chin and half-shut eyes set far apart. He seemed mute and patient, like an old sheep waiting to be let out.

"You'll like this preacher," she said. "The Reverend Bevel Summers. You ought

to hear him sing." The bedroom door opened suddenly and the father stuck his

head out and said, "Good-by, old man. Have a good time." "Good-by," the little boy said and jumped as if he had been shot. Mrs. Connin gave the watercolor another look. Then they went
out into the hall and rang for the elevator. "I wouldn't have drew it," she said.

Outside the gray morning was blocked off on either side by the unlit empty buildings. "It's going to fair up later," she said, "but this is the last time we'll be able to have any preaching at the river this year. Wipe your nose, Sugar Boy."

He began rubbing his sleeve across it but she stopped him. "That ain't nice," she said. "Where's your handkerchief?"

He put his hands in his pockets and pretended to look for it while she waited. "Some people don't care how they send one off," she murmured to her reflection in the coffee shop window. "You per-vide." She took a red and blue flowered handkerchief out of her pocket and stooped down and began to work on his nose. "Now blow," she said and he blew. "You can borry it. Put it in your pocket."

He folded it up and put it in his pocket carefully and they walked on to die corner and leaned against the side of a closed drugstore to wait for die car. Mrs. Connin turned up her coat collar so that it met her hat in the back. Her eyelids began to droop and she looked as if she might go to sleep against the wall. The little boy put a slight pressure on her hand.

"What's your name?" she asked in a drowsy voice. "1 don't know but only your last name. I should have found out your first name." His name was Harry Ashfield and he had never thought at any time before of changing it. "Bevel," he said. Mrs. Connin raised herself from the wall. "Why ain't that a coincident!" she said. "I told you that's die name of this preacher!"

"Bevel," he repeated.

She stood looking down at him as if he had become a marvel to her. "I'll have to see you meet him today," she said. "He's no ordinary preacher. He's a healer. He couldn't do nothing for Mr. Connin diough. Mr. Connin didn't have die faidi but he said he would try anytiiing once. He had dlis griping in his gut."

The trolley appeared as a yellow spot at the end of the deserted street.

"He's gone to die government hospital now," she said, "and diey taken one-tliird of his stomach. I tell him he better tliank Jesus for what he's got left but he says he ain't thanking nobody. Well I declare," she murmured, "Bevel!"

They walked out to die tracks to wait. "Will he heal me?" Bevel asked.

"What you got?"

"I'm hungry," he decided finally.

"Didn't you have your breakfast?"

"I didn't have time to be hungry yet then," he said.

"Well when we get home we'll both have us sometiiing," she said. "I'm ready myself." They got in tile car and sat down a few seats behind the driver and Mrs. Connin took Bevel on her knees. "Now you be a good boy," she said, "and let me get some sleep. Just don't get off my lap." She lay her head back and as he watched, gradually her eyes closed and her mouth fell open to show a few long scattered teeth, some gold and some darker than her face; she began to whistle and blow like a musical skeleton. There was no one in the car but themselves and the driver and when he saw she was asleep, he took out the flowered handkerchief and unfolded it and examined it carefully. Then he folded it up again and unzipped a place in die innerlining of his coat and hid it in there and shortly he went to sleep himself.

Her house was a halt-mile from the end of the car line, set back a little from the road. It was tar paper brick with a porch across the front of it and a tin top. On the porch there were three little boys of different sizes with identical speckled faces and one tall girl who had her hair up in so many aluminum curlers that it glared like the roof. The three boys followed them inside and closed in on Bevel. Thev looked at him silently, not smiling.

"That's Bevel," Mrs. Connin said, taking off her coat. "It's a coincident he's named the same as the preacher. These boys are J. C, Spivey, and Sinclair, and that's Sarah Mildred on the porch. Take off that coat and hang it on the bed post, Bevel."

The three boys watched him while he unbuttoned the coat and took it off. Then they watched him hang it on the bed post and tiien they stood, watching the coat. They turned abruptly and went out the door and had a conference on the porch.

Bevel stood looking around him at the room. It was part kitchen and part bedroom. The entire house was two rooms and two porches. Close to his foot the tail of a light-colored dog moved up and down between two floor boards as he scratched his back on the underside of the house. Bevel jumped on it but tlie hound was experienced and had already withdrawn when his feet hit the spot.

The walls were filled with pictures and calendars. There were two round photographs of an old man and woman with collapsed mouths and another picture of a man whose eyebrows dashed out of two bushes of hair and clashed in a heap on the bridge of his nose; the rest of his face stuck out like a bare cliff to fall from. "That's Mr. Connin," Mrs. Connin said, standing back from the stove for a second to admire the face with him, "but it don't favor him any more." Bevel

turned from Mr. Connin to a colored picture over the bed of a man wearing a white sheet. He had long hair and a gold circle around his head and he was sawing on a board while some children stood watching him. He was going to ask who tJiat was when the tiiree boys came in again and motioned for him to follow them. He tJiought of crawling under the bed and hanging onto one of tiie legs but tiie three boys only stood there, speckled and silent, waiting, and after a second he followed them at a little distance out on die porch and around the corner of the house. They started off through a field of rough yellow weeds to the hog pen, a five-foot boarded square full of shoats, which they intended to ease him over into. When tiiey reached it, they turned and waited silently, leaning against tiie side.

He was coming very slowly, deliberately bumping his feet together as if he had trouble walking. Once he had been beaten up in the park by some strange boys when his sitter forgot him, but he hadn't known anydiing was going to happen tiiat time until it was over. He began to smell a strong odor of garbage and to hear the noises of a wild animal. He stopped a few feet from the pen and waited, pale but dogged.

The tiiree boys didn't move. Something seemed to have happened to tiiem. They stared over his head as if tiiey saw something coming behind him but he was afraid to turn his own head and look. Their speckles were pale and their eyes were still and gray as glass. Only dieir ears twitched slightly. Nothing happened. Finally, tiie one in **the** middle said, "She'd kill us," and turned, dejected and hacked, **and** climbed up on tiie pen and hung over, staring in.

Bevel sat down on tiie ground, dazed witii relief, and grinned up at diem.

The one sitting on die pen glanced at him severely. "Hey you," he said after a second, "if you can't climb up and see tiiese pigs you **can** lift tiiat bottom board off and look in tiiataway." He appeared to offer this as a kindness.

Bevel had never seen a real pig but he had seen a pig in a book **and** knew tiiey were small fat pink animals widi curly tails and **round** grinning faces and bow ties. He leaned forward and pulled **eagerly** at die board.

"Pull harder," the littlest boy said. "It's nice and rotten. Just lift out thet nail."

He eased a long reddish nail out of the soft wood.

"Now you can lift up the board and put your face to the . . ." a quiet voice began.

He had already done it and another face, gray, wet and sour, was pushing into his, knocking him down and back as it scraped out under the plank. Something snorted over him and charged back again, rolling him over and pushing him up from behind and then sending him forward, screaming through the yellow field, while it bounded behind.

The three Connins watched from where they were. The one sitting on the pen held the loose board back with his gangling foot. Their stern faces didn't brighten any but diey seemed to become less taut, as if some great need had been partly satisfied. "Maw ain't going to like him lettin' out thet hawg," die smallest one said.

Mrs. Connin was on the back porch and caught Bevel up as he reached the steps. The hog ran under the house and subsided, panting, but the child screamed for five minutes. When she had finally calmed him down, she gave him his breakfast and let him sit on her lap while he ate it. The shoat climbed the two steps onto the back porch and stood outside die screen door, looking in widi his head lowered sullenly. He was long-legged and humpbacked and part of one of his ears had been bitten off.

"Git away!" Mrs. Connin shouted. "That one yonder favors Mr-Paradise that has the gas station," she said. "You'll see him today at die healing. He's got die cancer over his ear. He always comes to show he ain't been healed."

The shoat stood squinting a few seconds longer and then moved
off slowly. "I don't want to see him," Bevel said.

They walked to the river, Mrs. Connin in front with him and die three boys strung out behind and Sarah Mildred, die tall girl, at the end to holler if one of them ran out on die road. They looked like the skeleton of an old boat with two pointed ends, sailing slowly, on die edge of the highway. The white Sunday sun followed at a little distance, climbing fast through a scum of gray cloud as if it meant to overtake diem. Bevel walked on the outside edge, holding Mrs. Connin's hand and looking down into the orange and purple gulley that dropped off from the concrete.

It occurred to him that he was lucky this time that they had found Mrs. Connin who would take you away for tiie day instead of an ordinary sitter who only sat where you lived or went to the park. You found out more when you left where you lived. He had found out already this morning that he had been made by a carpenter named Jesus Christ. Before he had thought it had been a doctor named Sladewall, a fat man with a yellow mustache who gave him shots and thought his name was Herbert, but this must have been a joke. They joked a lot where he lived. If he had thought about it before, he would have thought Jesus Christ was a word like "oh" or "damn" or "God," or maybe somebody who had cheated them out of something sometime. When he had asked Mrs. Connin who the man in the sheet in the picture over her bed was, she had looked at him a while with her mouth open. Then she had said, "That's Jesus," and she had kept on looking at him.

In a few minutes she had got up and got a book out of the other room. "See here," she said, turning over the cover, "this belonged to my great grandmamma. I wouldn't part with it for nothing on earth." She ran her finger under some brown writing on a spotted page. "Emma Stevens Oakley, 1832," she said. "Ain't that something to have? And every word of it the gospel truth." She turned the next page and read him the name: "The Life of Jesus Christ for Readers Under Twelve." Then she read him die book.

It was a small book, pale brown on the outside with gold edges and a smell like old putty. It was full of pictures, one of the carpenter driving a crowd of pigs out of a man. They were real pigs, gray and sour-looking, and Mrs. Connin said Jesus had driven them all out of this one man. When she finished reading, she let him sit on the floor and look at the pictures again.

Just before they left for the healing, he had managed to get the book inside his innerlining without her seeing him. Now it made his coat hang down a litde farther on one side than the other. His mind was dreamy and serene as they walked along and when they turned off the highway onto a long red clay road winding between banks of honeysuckle, he began to make wild leaps and pull forward on her hand as if he wanted to dash off and snatch the sun which was rolling away ahead of them now.

They walked on die dirt road for a while and then diey crossed a field stippled with purple weeds and entered die shadows of a wood where the ground was covered with thick pine needles. He had never been in woods before and he walked carefully, looking from side to side as if he were entering a strange country. They moved along a bridle path that twisted downhill dirough crackling red leaves, and once, catching at a branch to keep himself from slipping, he looked into two frozen green-gold eyes enclosed in die darkness of a tree hole. At the bottom of the hill, the woods opened suddenly onto a pasture dotted here and there widi black and white cows and sloping down, tier after tier, to a broad orange stream where the reflection of the sun was set like a diamond.

There were people standing on the near bank in a group, singing. Long tables were set up behind them and a few cars and trucks were parked in a road that came up by the river. They crossed the pasture, hurrying, because Mrs. Connin, using her hand for a shed over her eyes, saw the preacher already standing out in die water. She dropped her basket on one of the tables and pushed die diree boys in front of her into the knot of people so diat they wouldn't linger by the food. She kept Bevel by the hand and eased her way up to die front.

The preacher was standing about ten feet out in die stream where the water came up to his knees. He was a tall youth in khaki trousers that he had rolled up higher than the water. He had on a blue shirt

and a red scarf around his neck but no hat and his light-colored hair was cut in sideburns that curved into the hollows of his cheeks. His face was all bone and red light reflected from the river. He looked as if he might have been nineteen years old. He was singing in a. high twangy voice, above die singing on die bank, and he kept his hands behind him and his head tilted back.

He ended the hymn on a high note and stood silent, looking down at the water and shifting his feet in it. Then he looked up at **the** people on the bank. They stood close togedier, waiting; dieir faces, were solemn but expectant and every eye was on him. He shifted his feet again.

"Maybe I know why you come," he said in the twangy voice, "maybe I don't.

"If you ain't come for Jesus, you ain't come for me. If you just come to see can you leave your pain in the river, you ain't come for Jesus. You can't leave your pain in the river," he said. "I never told nobody that." He stopped and looked down at his knees.

"I seen you cure a woman oncet!" a sudden high voice shouted from the hump of people. "Seen that woman git up and walk out straight where she had limped in!"

The preacher lifted one foot and then the other. He seemed almost but not quite to smile. "You might as well go home if that's what you come for," he said.

Then he lifted his head and arms and shouted, "Listen to what I got to say, you people! There ain't but one river and that's the River of Life, made out of Jesus' Blood. That's the river you have to lay your pain in, in the River of Faith, in the River of Life, in the River of Love, in the rich red river of Jesus' Blood, you people!"

His voice grew soft and musical. "All the rivers come from that one River and go back to it like it was the ocean sea and if you believe, you can lay your pain in that River and get rid of it because that's the River that was made to carry sin. It's a River full of pain itself, pain itself, moving toward the Kingdom of Christ, to be washed away, slow, you people, slow as this here old red water river round my feet.

"Listen," he sang, "I read in Mark about an unclean man, I read in Luke about a blind man, I read in John about a dead man! Oh you people hear! The same blood that makes this River red, made **that** leper clean, made that blind man stare, made that dead man **leap!** You people with trouble," he cried, "lay it in that River of Blood, lay it in that River of Pain, and watch it move away toward **the** Kingdom of Christ."

While he preached, Bevel's eyes followed drowsily the slow circles of two

silent birds revolving high in the air. Across the river there was a low red and gold grove of sassafras with hills of dark blue **trees** behind it and an occasional pine jutting over the skyline. Behind, in the distance, the city rose like a cluster of warts on the **side** of the mountain. The birds revolved downward and dropped lighdy in die top of die highest pine and sat hunch-shouldered as if they were supporting die sky.

"If it's mis River of Life you want to lay your pain in, then come up," tiie preacher said, "and lay your sorrow here. But don't be thinking this is the last of it because this old red river don't end here. This old red suffering stream goes on, you people, slow to die Kingdom of Christ. This old red river is good to Baptize in, good to lay your faidi in, good to lay your pain in, but it ain't tiiis muddy water here diat saves you. I been all up and down diis river this week," he said. "Tuesday I was in Fortune Lake, next day in Ideal, Friday me and my wife drove to Lulawillow to see a sick man diere. Them people didn't see no healing," he said and his face burned redder for a second. "I never said diey would."

While he was talking a fluttering figure had begun to move forward with a kind of butterfly movement—an old woman widi flapping arms whose head wobbled as if it might fall off any second. She managed to lower herself at the edge of the bank and let her arms churn in die water. Then she bent farther and pushed her face down in it and raised herself up finally, streaming wet; and still flapping, she turned a time or two in a blind circle until someone reached out and pulled her back into die group.

"She's been diat way for thirteen years," a rough voice shouted. "Pass die hat and give this kid his money. That's what he's here for." The shout, directed out to the boy in die river, came from a huge old man who sat like a humped stone on die bumper of a long ancient gray automobile. He had on a gray hat diat was turned down over one ear and up over the other to expose a purple bulge on his left temple. He sat bent forward with his hands hanging between his knees and his small eyes half closed.

Bevel stared at him once and then moved into die folds of Mrs. Connin's coat and hid himself.

The boy in die river glanced at the old man quickly and raised his fist. "Believe Jesus or die devil!" he cried. "Testify to one or die odier!"

"I know from my own self-experience," a woman's mysterious voice called from die knot of people, "I know from it diat diis preacher can heal. My eyes have been opened! I testify to Jesus!"

The preacher lifted his arms quickly and began to repeat all diat he had said before about die River and the Kingdom of Christ and the old man sat on

die bumper, fixing him with a narrow squint. From time to time Bevel stared at him again from around Mrs. Connin.

A man in overalls and a brown coat leaned forward and dipped his hand in die water quickly and shook it and leaned back, and a woman held a baby over the edge of die bank and splashed its feet widi water. One man moved a little distance away and sat down on die bank and took off his shoes and waded out into die stream; he stood diere for a few minutes widi his face tilted as far back as it would go, dien he waded back and put on his shoes. All diis time, die preacher sang and did not appear to watch what went on.

As soon as he stopped singing, Mrs. Connin lifted Bevel up and said, "Listen here, preacher, I got a boy from town today diat I'm keeping. His mamma's sick and he wants you to pray for her. And diis is a coincident—his name is Bevel! Bevel," she said, turning to look at the people behind her, "same as his. Ain't that a coincident, though?"

There were some murmurs and Bevel turned and grinned over her shoulder at the faces looking at him. "Bevel," he said in a loud jaunty voice.

"Listen," Mrs. Connin said, "have you ever been Baptized, Bevel?"

He only grinned.

"I suspect he ain't ever been Baptized," Mrs. Connin said, raising her eyebrows at die preacher. "Swang him over here," the preacher said and took a stride forward and caught him.

He held him in die crook of his arm and looked at the grinning face. Bevel rolled his eyes in a comical way and dirust his face forward, close to die preacher's. "My name is Bevvvuuuuul," he said in a loud deep voice and let the tip of his tongue slide across his moudi.

The preacher didn't smile. His bony face was rigid and his narrow gray eyes reflected die almost colorless sky. There was a loud laugh from die old man sitting on the car bumper and Bevel grasped **die** back of die preacher's collar and held it tighdy. The grin had **already** disappeared from his face. He had die sudden feeling diat **this** was not a joke. Where he lived everydiing was a joke. From **the** preacher's face, he knew immediately that nothing die preacher said or did was a joke. "My mother named me that," he said quickly.

"Have you ever been Baptized?" the preacher asked.

"What's that?" he murmured.

"If I Baptize you," die preacher said, "you'll be able to go to die Kingdom of Christ. You'll be washed in the river of suffering, son, and you'll go by the deep river of life. Do you want that?" "Yes," the child said, and thought, I

won't go back to the apartment then, I'll go under the river.

"You won't be die same again," die preacher said. "You'll count." Then he turned his face to die people and began to preach and Bevel looked over his shoulder at the pieces of the white sun scattered in the river. Suddenly the preacher said, "All right, I'm going to Baptize you now," and without more warning, he tightened his hold and swung him upside down and plunged his head into die water. He held him under while he said the words of Baptism and dien he jerked him up again and looked sternly at the gasping child. Bevel's eyes were dark and dilated. "You count now," **die** preacher said. "You didn't even count before."

The little boy was too shocked to cry. He spit out tlie muddy water and rubbed his wet sleeve into his eyes and over his face. "Don't forget his mamma," Mrs. Connin called. "He wants you to pray for his mamma. She's sick."

"Lord," the preacher said, "we pray for somebody in affliction who isn't here to testify. Is your mother sick in the hospital?" he asked. "Is she in pain?"

The child stared at him. "She hasn't got up yet," he said in a high dazed voice. "She has a hangover." The air was so quiet he could hear the broken pieces of the sun knocking die water.

The preacher looked angry and starded. The red drained out of his face and die sky appeared to darken in his eyes. There was a loud guffaw from the bank and Mr. Paradise shouted, "Haw! Cure the afflicted woman with die hangover I" and began to beat his **knee** with his fist.

"He's had a long day," Mrs. Connin said, standing widi him in die door of die apartment and looking sharply into die room where die party was going on. "I reckon it's past his regular bedtime." One of Bevel's eyes was closed and the other half closed; his nose was running and he kept his mouth open and breathed through it. The damp plaid coat dragged down on one side.

That would be her, Mrs. Connin decided, in the black britches— long black satin britches and barefoot sandals and red toenails. She was lying on half the sofa, with her knees crossed in the air and her head propped on die arm. She didn't get up.

"Hello Harry," she said. "Did you have a big day?" She had a long pale face, smooth and blank, and straight sweet-potato-colored hair, pulled back.

The father went off to get the money. There were two otiier couples. One of tlie men, blond with little violet-blue eyes, leaned out of his chair and said, "Well Harry, old man, have a big day?"

"His name ain't Harry. It's Bevel," Mrs. Connin said. "His name is Harry," *she* said from die sofa. "Whoever heard of anybody named Bevel?"

The little boy had seemed to be going to sleep on his feet, his head drooping farther and farther forward; he pulled it back suddenly and opened one eye; the other was stuck.

"He told me this morning his name was Bevel," Mrs. Connin said in a shocked voice. "The same as our preacher. We been all day at a preaching and healing at the river. He said his name was Bevel, the same as the preacher's. That's what he told me."

"Bevel!" his modier said. "My God I what a name."

"This preacher is name Bevel and there's no better preacher around," Mrs. Connin said. "And furthermore," she added in a defiant tone, "he Baptized this child this morning!"

His modier sat straight up. "Well the nerve!" she muttered.

"Furthermore," Mrs. Connin said, "he's a healer and he prayed for you to be healed." "Healed!" she almost shouted. "Healed of what for Christ's sake?" "Of your affliction," Mrs. Connin said icily. The father had returned with the money and was standing near

Mrs. Connin waiting to give it to her. His eyes were lined witli red threads. "Go on, go on," he said, "I want to hear more about her affliction. The exact nature of it has escaped . . ." He waved die bill and his voice trailed off. "Healing by prayer is mighty inexpensive," he murmured.

Mrs. Connin stood a second, staring into the room, with a skeleton's appearance of seeing everything. Then, without taking the money, she turned and shut the door behind her. The father swung around, smiling vaguely, and shrugged. The rest of them were looking at Harry. The little boy began to shamble toward the bedroom.

"Come here, Harry," his mother said. He automatically shifted his direction toward her without opening his eyes any farther. "Tell me what happened today," she said when he reached her. She began to pull off his coat.

"I don't know," he muttered.

"Yes you do know," she said, feeling die coat heavier on one side. She unzipped die innerlining and caught die book and a dirty handkerchief as diey fell out. "Where did you get diese?"

"I don't know," he said and grabbed for diem. "They're mine. She gave diem to me."

She direw the handkerchief down and held the book too high for him to reach and began to read it, her face after a second assuming an exaggerated comical

expression. The others moved around and looked at it over her shoulder. "My God," somebody said.

One of the men peered at it sharply from behind a thick pair of glasses. "That's valuable," he said. "That's a collector's item," and he took it away from die rest of them and retired to anodier chair.

"Don't let George go off with that," his girl said.

"I tell you it's valuable," George said. "1832."

Bevel shifted his direction again toward die room where he slept. He shut the door behind him and moved slowly in the darkness to die bed and sat down and took off his shoes and got under die cover. After a minute a shaft of light let in the tall silhouette of his mother. She tiptoed lightly cross the room and sat down on the edge of his bed. "What did that dolt of a preacher say about me?" she whispered. "What lies have you been telling today, honey?"

He shut his eye and heard her voice from a long way away, as if he were under the river and she on top of it. She shook his shoulder. "Harry," she said, leaning down and putting her mouth to his ear, "tell me what he said." She pulled him into a sitting position and he felt as if he had been drawn up from under the river. "Tell me," she whispered and her bitter breath covered his face. He saw the pale oval close to him in the dark. "He said I'm not the same now," he muttered. "I count."

After a second, she lowered him by his shirt front onto the pillow. She hung over him an instant and brushed her lips against his forehead. Then she got up and moved away, swaying her hips lightly through the shaft of light.

He didn't wake up early but the apartment was still dark and close when he did. For a while he lay there, picking his nose and eyes. Then he sat up in bed and looked out the window. The sun came in palely, stained gray by the glass. Across the street at the Empire Hotel, a colored cleaning woman was looking down from an upper window, resting her face on her folded arms. He got up and put on his shoes and went to the bathroom and then into the front room. He ate two crackers spread with anchovy paste, that he found on the coffee table, and drank some ginger ale left in a bottle and looked around for his book but it was not there.

The apartment was silent except for the faint humming of the refrigerator. He went into the kitchen and found some raisin bread heels and spread a half jar of peanut butter between them and climbed up on the tall kitchen stool and sat chewing the sandwich slowly, wiping his nose every now and then on his shoulder. When he finished he found some chocolate milk and drank that. He would rather have had the ginger ale he saw but they left the bottle openers

where he couldn't reach them. He studied what was left in die refrigerator for a while—some shriveled vegetables that she had forgot were there and a lot of brown oranges that she bought and didn't squeeze; there were tJiree or four kinds of cheese and something fishy in a paper bag; the rest was a pork bone. He left the refrigerator door open and wandered back into the dark living room and sat down on the sofa.

He decided they would be out cold until one o'clock and that they would all have to go to a restaurant for lunch. He wasn't high enough for the table yet and the waiter would bring a highchair and he was too big for a highchair. He sat in the middle of the sofa, kicking it with his heels. Then he got up and wandered around the room, looking into the ashtrays at the butts as if this might be a habit. In his own room he had picture books and blocks but they were for the most part torn up; he found die way to get new ones was to tear up the ones he had. There was very little to do at any time but eat; however, he was not a fat boy.

He decided he would empty a few of the ashtrays on the floor. If he only emptied a few, she would tiiink tliey had fallen. He emptied two, rubbing the ashes carefully into the rug with his finger. Then he lay on the floor for a while, studying his feet which he held up in the air. His shoes were still damp and he began to tiiink about die river.

Very slowly, his expression changed as if he were gradually seeing appear what he didn't know he'd been looking for. Then all of a sudden he knew what he wanted to do.

He got up and tiptoed into their bedroom and stood in die dim light tiiere, looking for her pocketbook. His glance passed her long pale arm hanging off the edge of the bed down to the floor, and across the white mound his father made, and past tlie crowded bureau, until it rested on die pocketbook hung on the back of a chair. He took a car-token out of it and half a package of Life Savers. Then he left the apartment and caught the car at the corner. He hadn't taken a suitcase because there was nothing from there he wanted to keep.

He got off the car at die end of die line and started down die road he and Mrs. Connin had taken tiie day before. He knew there wouldn't be anybody at her house because tlie tliree boys and die girl went to school and Mrs. Connin had told him she went out to clean. He passed her yard and walked on die way diey had gone to die river. The paper brick houses were far apart and after a while tlie dirt place to walk on ended and he had to walk on die edge of the highway. The sun was pale yellow and high and hot.

He passed a shack widi an orange gas pump in front of it but

he didn't see the old man looking out at nodiing in particular from the doorway. Mr. Paradise was having an orange drink. He finished

it slowly, squinting over die bottle at die small plaid-coated figure disappearing down die road. Then he set die empty bottle on a bench and, still squinting, wiped his sleeve over his moudi. He went in the shack and picked out a peppermint stick, a foot long and two inches thick, from the candy shelf, and stuck it in his hip pocket. Then he got in his car and drove slowly down the highway after the boy.

By the time Bevel came to the field speckled widi purple weeds, he was dusty and sweating and he crossed it at a trot to get into the woods as fast as he could. Once inside, he wandered from tree to tree, trying to find the path they had taken yesterday. Finally he found a line worn in the pine needles and followed it until he saw the steep trail twisting down through the trees.

Mr. Paradise had left his automobile back some way on the road and had walked to the place where he was accustomed to sit almost every day, holding an unbaited fishline in the water while he stared at the river passing in front of him. Anyone looking at him from a distance would have seen an old boulder half hidden in the bushes.

Bevel didn't see him at all. He only saw the river, shimmering reddish yellow, and bounded into it with his shoes and his coat on and took a gulp. He swallowed some and spit the rest out and then he stood there in water up to his chest and looked around him. The sky was a clear pale blue, all in one piece—except for die hole the sun made—and fringed around the bottom with treetops. His coat floated to the surface and surrounded him like a strange gay lily pad and he stood grinning in the sun. He intended not to fool with preachers any more but to Baptize himself and to keep on going diis time until he found die Kingdom of Christ in the river. He didn't mean to waste any more time. He put his head under the water at once and pushed forward.

In a second he began to gasp and sputter and his head reappeared on the surface; he started under again and the same thing happened. The river wouldn't have him. He tried again and came up, choking. This was the way it had been when the preacher held him under— he had had to fight with something that pushed him back in the face. He stopped and thought suddenly: it's another joke, it's just another joke I He thought how far he had come for nothing and he began to hit and splash and kick die filthy river. His feet were already treading on nothing. He gave one low cry of pain and indignation. Then he heard a shout and turned his head and saw something like a giant pig bounding after him, shaking a red and white club and shouting. He plunged under once and this time, the waiting current caught him like a long gentle hand and pulled him swiftly forward and down. For an instant he was overcome widi surprise: then since he was moving quickly and knew that he was getting somewhere, all his fury and

fear left him.

Mr. Paradise's head appeared from time to time on the surface of the water. Finally, far downstream, the old man rose like some ancient water monster and stood empty-handed, staring with his dull eyes as far down the river line as he could see.

A Circle in the Fire

SOMETIMES the last line of trees was a solid gray-blue wall a little darker than die sky but this afternoon it was almost black and behind it die sky was a livid glaring white. "You know that woman that had tiiat baby in tiiat iron lung?" Mrs. Pritchard said. She and the child's mother were underneath die window the child was looking down from. Mrs. Pritchard was leaning against the chimney, her arms folded on a shelf of stomach, one foot crossed and the toe pointed into the ground. She was a large woman witli a small pointed face and steady ferreting eyes. Mrs. Cope was die opposite, very small and trim, with a large round face and black eyes tiiat seemed to be enlarging all the time behind her glasses as if she were continually being astonished. She was squatting down pulling grass out of the border beds around die house. Botii women had on sun-hats diat had once been identical but now Mrs. Pritchard's was faded and out of shape while Mrs. Cope's was still stiff and bright green. "I read about her," she said. "She was a Pritchard tiiat married a Brookins and so's kin to me— about my seventh or eighth cousin by marriage." "Well, well," Mrs. Cope muttered and tiirew a large clump of nut grass behind her. She worked at tiie weeds and nut grass as if they were an evil sent directly by the devil to destroy tiie place. "Bcinst she was kin to us, we gone to see the body," Mrs. Pritchard said. "Seen die little baby too." Mrs. Cope didn't say anything. She was used to tiiese calamitous stones; she said they wore her to a frazzle. Mrs. Pritchard would go thirty miles for die satisfaction of seeing anybody laid away. Mrs. Cope always changed tiie subject to something cheerful but

the child had observed that this only put Mrs. Pritchard in a bad humor.

The child diought die blank sky looked as if it were pushing against the fortress wall, trying to break dirough. The trees across die near field were a patchwork of gray and yellow greens. Mrs. Cope was always worrying about fires in her woods. When the nights were very windy, she would say to the child, "Oh Lord, do pray there won't be any fires, it's so windy," and the child would grunt from behind her book or not answer at all because she heard it so often. In the evenings in die summer when they sat on the porch, Mrs. Cope would say to the child who was reading fast to catch the last light, "Get up and look at the sunset, it's gorgeous. You ought to get up and look at it," and the child would scowl and not answer or glare up once across die lawn and two front pastures to the gray-blue sentinel line of trees and then begin to read again with no change of

expression, sometimes muttering for meanness, "It looks like a fire. You better get up and smell around and see if the woods ain't on fire."

"She had her arm around it in the coffin," Mrs. Pritchard went on, but her voice was drowned out by die sound of die tractor diat the Negro, Culver, was driving up the road from die barn. The wagon was attached and another Negro was sitting in die back, bouncing, his feet jogging about a foot from the ground. The one on the tractor drove it past the gate diat led into the field on die left.

Mrs. Cope turned her head and saw diat he had not gone dirough the gate because he was too lazy to get off and open it. He was going the long way around at her expense. "Tell him to stop and come here!" she shouted.

Mrs. Pritchard heaved herself from the chimney and waved her arm in a fierce circle but he pretended not to hear. She stalked to the edge of the lawn and screamed, "Get off, I toljcr! She wants you!"

He got off and started toward die chimney, pushing his head and shoulders forward at each step to give the appearance of hurry ing. His head was dirust up to die top in a white cloth hat streaked with different shades of sweat. The brim was down and hid all but die lower parts of his reddish eyes.

Mrs. Cope was on her knees, pointing the trowel into the ground. "Why aren't you going through the gate there?" she asked and waited, her eyes shut and her mouth stretched flat as if she were prepared for any ridiculous answer.

"Got to raise the blade on the mower if we do," he said and his gaze bore just to the left of her. Her Negroes were as destructive and impersonal as the nut grass.

Her eyes, as she opened them, looked as if they would keep on enlarging until they turned her wrongsideout. "Raise it," she said and pointed across the road with the trowel.

He moved off.

"It's nothing to them," she said. "They don't have the responsibility. I thank the Lord all these things don't come at once. They'd destroy me."

"Yeah, they would," Mrs. Pritchard shouted against the sound of die tractor. He opened die gate and raised the blade and drove through and down into the field; the noise diminished as the wagon disappeared. "I don't see myself how she had it *in* it," she went on in her normal voice.

Mrs. Cope was bent over, digging fiercely at the nut grass again. "We have a lot to be thankful for," she said. "Every day you should say a prayer of thanksgiving. Do you do that?"

"Yes'm," Mrs. Pritchard said. "See she was in it four months before she even got thataway. Look like to me if I was in one of them, I would leave off . . . how you reckon they .. . ?"

"Every day I say a prayer of dianksgiving," Mrs. Cope said. "Think of all we have. Lord," she said and sighed, "we have everything," and she looked around at her rich pastures and hills heavy with timber and shook her head as if it might all be a burden she was trying to shake off her back.

Mrs. Pritchard studied the woods. "All I got is four abscess teeth," she remarked.

"Well, be thankful you don't have five," Mrs. Cope snapped and threw back a clump of grass. "We might all be destroyed by a hurricane. I can always find something to be diankful for."

Mrs. Pritchard took up a hoe resting against the side of the house and struck lightly at a weed diat had come up between two bricks in the chimney. "I reckon *you* can," she said, her voice a little more nasal than usual with contempt.

"Why, think of all those poor Europeans," Mrs. Cope went on, "that they put in boxcars like cattle and rode them to Siberia. Lord," she said, "we ought to spend half our time on our knees."

"I know if I was in an iron lung diere would be some dungs I wouldn't do," Mrs. Pritchard said, scratching her bare ankle with the end of the hoe.

"Even that poor woman had plenty to be thankful for," Mrs. Cope said.

"She could be thankful she wasn't dead."

"Certainly," Mrs. Cope said, and then she pointed the trowel up at Mrs. Pritchard and said, "I have the best kept place in the county and do you know why? Because I work. I've had to work to save this place and work to keep it." She emphasized each word with the trowel. "I don't let anything get ahead of me and I'm not always looking for trouble. I take it as it comes."

"If it all come at oncet sometime," Mrs. Pritchard began.

"It doesn't all come at once," Mrs. Cope said sharply.

The child could see over to where the dirt road joined the high way. She saw a pick-up truck stop at the gate and let off three boys who started walking up the pink dirt road. They walked single file, the middle one bent to the side carrying a black pig-shaped valise.

"Well, if it ever did," Mrs. Pritchard said, "it wouldn't be nodiing you could do but fling up your hands."

Mrs. Cope didn't even answer this. Mrs. Pritchard folded her arms

and gazed down the road as if she could easily enough see all diese fine hills flattened to nodiing. She saw the diree boys who had almost reached the front walk by now. "Lookit yonder," she said. "Who you reckon they are?"

Mrs. Cope leaned back and supported herself with one hand behind her and looked. The three came toward them but as if they were going to walk on through the side of the house. The one widi the suitcase was in front now. Finally about four feet from her, he stopped and set it down. The three boys looked something alike except that the middle-sized one wore silver-rimmed spectacles and carried die suitcase. One of his eyes had a slight cast to it so that his gaze seemed to be coming from two directions at once as if it had them surrounded. He had on a sweat shirt with a faded destroyer printed on it but his chest was so hollow that the destroyer was broken in the middle and seemed on the point of going under. His hair was stuck to his forehead with sweat. He looked to be about thirteen. All three boys had white penetrating stares. "I don't reckon you remember me, Mrs. Cope," he said.

"Your face is certainly familiar," she murmured, scrutinizing him. "Now let's see . . . "

"My daddy used to work here," he hinted.

"Boyd?" she said. "Your father was Mr. Boyd and you're J.C.?"

"Nome, I'm Powell, the secont one, only I've growed some since then and my daddy he's daid now. Done died." "Dead. Well I declare," Mrs. Cope said as if death were always an unusual thing. "What was Mr. Boyd's trouble?"

One of Powell's eyes seemed to be making a circle of the place, examining the house and the white water tower behind it and the chicken houses and the pastures that rolled away on either side until they met the first line of woods. The other eye looked at her. "Died in Florda," he said and began kicking the valise.

"Well I declare," she murmured. After a second she said, "And how is your mother?" "Mah'd again." He kept watching his foot kick the suitcase. The odier two boys stared at her impatiently.

"And where do you all live now?" she asked.

"Atlanta," he said. "You know, out to one of diem developments."

"Well I see," she said, "I see." After a second she said it again. Finally she asked, "And who are these other boys?" and smiled at them.

"Garfield Smith him, and W. T. Harper him," he said, nodding his head backward first in the direction of the large boy and men the small one.

"How do you boys do?" Mrs. Cope said. "This is Mrs. Pritchard. Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard work here now."

They ignored Mrs. Pritchard who watched them with steady beady eyes. The three seemed to hang there, waiting, watching **Mrs.** Cope.

"Well well," she said, glancing at die suitcase, "it's nice of you to stop and see me. I think that was real sweet of you." Powell's stare seemed to pinch her like a pair of tongs. "Come back to see how you was doing," he said hoarsely.

"Listen here," the smallest boy said, "all the time we been knowing him he's been telling us about this here place. Said it was everything here. Said it was horses here. Said he had the best time of his entire life right here on this here place. Talks about it all the time."

"Never shuts his trap about this place," the big boy grunted, drawing his arm across his nose as if to muffle his words.

"Always talking about them horses he rid here," the small one continued, "and said he would let us ride them too. Said it was one name Gene."

Mrs. Cope was always afraid someone would get hurt on her place and sue her for everything she had. "They aren't shod," she said quickly. "There was one named Gene but he's dead now but I'm lfraid you boys can't ride die horses because you might get hurt. They're dangerous," she said, speaking very fast.

The large boy sat down on the ground widi a noise of disgust and began to finger rocks out of his tennis shoe. The small one darted looks here and there and Powell fixed her with his stare and didn't say anything.

After a minute the little boy said, "Say, lady, you know what he said one time? He said when he died he wanted to come here!"

For a second Mrs. Cope looked blank; then she blushed; then a peculiar look of pain came over her face as she realized that these children were hungry. They were staring because diey were hungry! She almost gasped in their faces and then she asked them quickly if they would have something to eat. They said they would but their expressions, composed and unsatisfied, didn't lighten any. They looked as if they were used to being hungry and it was no business of hers.

The child upstairs had grown red in die face with excitement. She was kneeling down by die window so diat only her eyes and forehead showed over the sill. Mrs. Cope told the boys to come around on the other side of the house where die lawn chairs were and she led die way and Mrs. Pritchard followed. The child moved from the right bedroom across the hall and over into die left bedroom and looked down on die other side of the house where diere were three white lawn chairs and red

hammock strung between two hazelnut trees. She was a pale fat girl of twelve with a frowning squint and a large mouth full of silver bands. She knelt down at the window.

The tiiree boys came around the corner of the house and the large one threw himself into the hammock and lit a stub of cigarette. The small boy tumbled down on the grass next to the black suitcase and rested his head on it and Powell sat down on the edge of one of die chairs and looked as if he were trying to enclose the whole place in one encircling stare. The child heard her mother and Mrs. Pritchard in a muted conference in the kitchen. She got up and went out into the hall and leaned over the banisters.

Mrs. Cope's and Mrs. Pritchard's legs were facing each other in die back hall. "Those poor children are hungry," Mrs. Cope said in a dead voice.

"You seen that suitcase?" Mrs. Pritchard asked. "What if diey intend to spend the night with you?"

Mrs. Cope gave a slight shriek. "I can't have three boys in here with only me and Sally Virginia," she said. "I'm sure they'll go when I feed them."

"I only know they got a suitcase," Mrs. Pritchard said.

The child hurried back to the window. The large boy was stretched out in die hammock with his wrists crossed under his head and die cigarette stub in the center of his mouth. He spit ir out in an arc just as Mrs. Cope came around the corner of the house with a plate of crackers. She stopped instantly as if a snake had been slung in her path. "Ashfieldl" she said. "Please pick that up. I'm afraid of fires."

"Gawfieldl" die little boy shouted indignantly. "Gawfield!"

The large boy raised himself without a word and lumbered for the butt. He picked it up and put it in his pocket and stood with his back to her, examining a tattooed heart on his forearm. Mrs. Pritchard came up holding three Coca-Colas by the necks in one hand and gave one to each of diem.

"I remember everything about this place," Powell said, looking down die opening of his bottle.

"Where did you all go when you left here?" Mrs. Cope asked and put the plate of crackers on the arm of his chair.

He looked at it but didn't take one. He said, "I remember it was one name Gene and it was one name George. We gone to Florda and my daddy he, you know, died, and then we gone to my sister's and then my mother she, you know, mah'd, and we been there ever since."

"There are some crackers," Mrs. Cope said and sat down in the chair across from him.

"He don't like it in Atlanta," the little boy said, sitting up and reaching

indifferently for a cracker. "He ain't ever satisfied with where he's at except this place here. Lemme tell you what he'll do, lady. We'll be playing ball, see, on this here place in diis development we got to play ball on, see, and he'll quit playing and say, 'Goddam, it was a horse down there name Gene and if I had him here I'd bust this concrete to hell riding him!' "

"I'm sure Powell doesn't use words like that, do you, Powell?" Mrs. Cope said.

"No, mam," Powell said. His head was turned completely to the side as if he were listening for the horses in die field. "I don't like them kind of crackers," die little boy said and returned his to the plate and got up. Mrs. Cope shifted in her chair. "So you boys live in one of those nice new developments," she said.

"The only way you can tell your own is by smell," the small boy volunteered. "They're four stories high and there's ten of them, one behind the other. Let's go see them horses," he said.

Powell turned his pinching look on Mrs. Cope. "We thought we would just spend the night in your barn," he said. "My uncle brought us this far on his pick-up truck and he's going to stop for us again in the morning."

There was a moment in which she didn't say a diing and the child in the window thought: she's going to fly out of diat chair and hit the tree.

"Well, I'm afraid you can't do that," she said, getting up suddenly. "The barn's full of hay and I'm afraid of fire from your cigarettes."

"We won't smoke," he said.

"I'm afraid you can't spend the night in there just the same," she repeated as if she were talking politely to a gangster.

"Well, we can camp out in the woods then," the little boy said. "We brought our own blankets anyways. That's what we got in theter suitcase. Come on."

"In the woods!" she said. "Oh no! The woods are very dry now, I can't have people smoking in my woods. You'll have to camp out in die field, in this field here next to the house, where there aren't any trees."

"Where she can keep her eye on you," the child said under her breadi.

"Her woods," the large boy muttered and got out of the hammock.

"We'll sleep in the field," Powell said but not particularly as if he were talking to her. "This afternoon I'm going to show them about this place." The other two were already walking away and he got up and bounded after them and the two women sat with the black suitcase between them.

"Not no thank you, not no nothing," Mrs. Pritchard remarked.

"They only played with what we gave them to eat," Mrs. Cope said in a hurt

voice. Mrs. Pritchard suggested that they might not like *soft* drinks. "They certainly *looked* hungry," Mrs. Cope said. About sunset they appeared out of the woods, dirty and sweating,

and came to the back porch and asked for water. They did not ask for food but Mrs. Cope could tell that they wanted it. "All I have is some cold guinea," she said. "Would you boys like some guinea and some sandwiches?"

"I wouldn't eat nothing bald-headed like a guinea," the little boy said. "I would eat a chicken or a turkey but not no guinea."

"Dog wouldn't eat one of them," die large boy said. He had taken oft* his shirt and stuck it in the back of his trousers like a tail. Mrs. Cope carefully avoided looking at him. The little boy had a cut on his arm.

"You boys haven't been riding the horses when I asked you not to, have you?" she asked suspiciously and they all said, "No mam!" at once in loud enthusiastic voices like the Amens are said in country churches.

She went into the house and made them sandwiches and, while she did it, she held a conversation with them from inside the kitchen, asking what their fathers did and how many brothers and sisters they had and where they went to school. They answered in short explosive sentences, pushing each other's shoulders and doubling up with laughter as if the questions had meanings she didn't know about. "And do you have men teachers or lady teachers at your school?" she asked.

"Some of both and some you can't tell which," the big boy hooted.

"And does your mother work, Powell?" she asked quickly.

"She ast you does your mother work I" the little boy yelled. "His mind's affected by them horses he only looked at," he said. "His mother she works at a factory and leaves him to mind the rest of them only he don't mind them much. Lemme tell you, lady, one time he locked his little brother in a box and set it on fire."

"I'm sure Powell wouldn't do a thing like that," she said, coming out with the plate of sandwiches and setting it down on the step. They emptied the plate at once and she picked it up and stood holding it, looking at the sun which was going down in front of them, almost on top of the tree line. It was swollen and flame-colored and hung in a net of ragged cloud as if it might burn through any second and fall into the woods. From the upstairs window the child saw her shiver and catch both arms to her sides. "We have so much to be thankful for," she said suddenly in a mournful marveling tone. "Do you boys thank God every night for all He's done for you? Do you thank Him for everything?"

This put an instant hush over them. They bit into the sandwiches

as if they had lost all taste for food.
"Do you?" she persisted.
They were as silent as thieves hiding. They chewed without a sound.
"Well, I know I do," she said at length and turned and went back to the house and the child watched their shoulders drop.
The large one stretched his legs out as if he were releasing himself from a trap. The sun burned so fast that it seemed to be trying to set everything in sight on fire. The white water tower was glazed pink and the grass was an unnatural green as if it were turning to glass. The child suddenly stuck her head far out the window and said, "Ugggghhrhh," in a loud voice, crossing her eyes and hanging **her** tongue out as far as possible as if she were going to vomit.

The large boy looked up and stared at her. "Jesus," he growled, "anodier woman."

She dropped back from the window and stood with her back against the wall, squinting fiercely as if she had been slapped in the face and couldn't see who had done it. As soon as they left the steps, she came down into the kitchen where Mrs. Cope was washing the dishes. "If I had that big boy down I'd beat the daylight out of him," she said.

"You keep away from those boys," Mrs. Cope said, turning sharply. "Ladies don't beat the daylight out of people. You keep out of their way. They'll be gone in the morning."

But in the morning they were not gone.

When she went out on the porch after breakfast, they were standing around the back door, kicking tiie steps. They were smelling the bacon she had had for her breakfast. "Why boys!" she said. "I thought you were going to meet your uncle." They had the same **look** of hardened hunger that had pained her yesterday but today she felt faintly provoked.

The big boy turned his back at once and the small one squatted down and began to scratch in the sand. "We ain't, though," Powell **said.**

The big boy turned his head just enough to take in a small section of her and said, "We ain't bothering nothing of yours."

He couldn't see die way her eyes enlarged but he could take note of the significant silence. After a minute she said in an altered voice, "Would you boys care for some breakfast?"

"We got plenty of our own food," the big boy said. "We don't want notiiing of yours."

She kept her eyes on Powell. His thin white face seemed to confront but not actually to see her. "You boys know that I'm **glad** to have you," she said, "but I expect you to behave. I expect you to act like gentlemen."

They stood there, each looking in a different direction, as if they were waiting for her to leave. "After all," she said in a suddenly high voice, "this is my place."

The big boy made some ambiguous noise and they turned and walked off toward the barn, leaving her there with a shocked look as if she had had a searchlight thrown on her in the middle of the night.

In a little while Mrs. Pritchard came over and stood in the kitchen door widi her cheek against the edge of it. "I reckon you know they rode them horses all yesterday afternoon," she said. "Stole a bridle out the saddleroom and rode bareback because Hollis seen them. He runnum out the barn at nine o'clock last night and then he runnum out the milk room this morning and there was milk all over their mouths like they had been drinking out the cans."

"I cannot have dris," Mrs Cope said and stood at the sink with both fists knotted at her sides. "I cannot have this," and her expression was the same as when she tore at the nut grass.

"There ain't a thing you can do about it," Mrs. Pritchard said. "What I expect is you'll have them for a week or so until school begins. They just figure to have themselves a vacation in the country and there ain't nothing you can do but fold your hands."

"I do not fold my hands," Mrs. Cope said. "Tell Mr. Pritchard to put die horses up in die stalls."

"He's already did that. You take a boy thirteen year old is equal in meanness to a man twict his age. It's no telling what he'll diink up to do. You never know where he'll strike next. This morning Hollis seen them behind the bull pen and diat big one ast if it wasn't some place they could wash at and Hollis said no it wasn't and diat you didn't want no boys dropping cigarette butts in your woods and he said, 'She don't own diem woods,' and Hollis said, 'Shes does too,' and that there little one he said, 'Man, Gawd owns them woods and her too,' and that there one widi the glasses said, 'I reckon she owns die sky over diis place too,' and diat diere littlest one says, 'Owns the sky and can't no airplane go over here without she says so,' and then the big one says, 'I never seen a place widi so many damn women on it, how do you stand it here?' and Hollis said he had done had enough of dieir big talk by dien and he turned and walked off without giving no reply one way or the other."

"I'm going out there and tell those boys they can get a ride away from here on die milk truck," Mrs. Cope said and she went out die back door, leaving Mrs.

Pritchard and the child together in the kitchen.

"Listen," die child said. "I could handle diem quicker than diat." "Yeah?" Mrs. Pritchard murmured, giving her a long leering look. "How'd you handle them?" The child gripped bodi hands together and made a contorted face as if she were strangling someone.

"They'd handle you," Mrs. Pritchard said with satisfaction.

The child retired to the upstairs window to get out of her way and looked down where her modier was walking off from the three boys who were squatting under die water tower, eating sometliing out of a cracker box. She heard her come in the kitchen door and say, "They say diey'll go on the milk truck, and no wonder they aren't hungry—diey have diat suitcase half full of food."

"Likely stole every bit of it too," Mrs. Pritchard said.

When the milk truck came, the three boys were nowhere in sight, **but** as soon as it left widiout them dieir diree faces appeared, looking out of the opening in die top of die calf barn. "Can you beat diis?" Mrs. Cope said, standing at one of die upstairs windows widi her hands at her hips. "It's not that I wouldn't be glad to have them—it's their attitude."

"You never like nobody's attitude," die child said. "I'll go tell them diey got five minutes to leave here in." "You are not to go anywhere near diose boys, do you hear me?" **Mrs.** Cope said.

"Why?" the child asked.

"I'm going out there and give them a piece of my mind," Mrs. **Cope** said.

The child took over die position in die window and in a few minutes she saw the stiff green hat catching the glint of the sun as **her** mother crossed the road toward die calf barn. The three faces immediately disappeared from die opening, and in a second die large **boy** dashed across the lot, followed an instant later by the odier two. **Mrs.** Pritchard came out and the two women started for the grove of trees die boys had vanished into. Presently die two sunhats **disappeared** in die woods and die three boys came out at die left side o£ it and ambled across the field and into anodier patch of woods. By the time Mrs. Cope and Mrs. Pritchard reached the field, it was empty and there was nothing for them to do but come home again.

Mrs. Cope had not been inside long before Mrs. Pritchard came running toward the house, shouting something. "They've let out the bull I" she hollered. "Let out the bull I" And in a second she was followed by the bull himself, ambling, black and leisurely, with four geese hissing at his heels. He was not mean until hurried and it took Mr. Pritchard and the two Negroes a half-hour to ease him back to his pen. While die men were engaged in this, die boys let die

oil out of tlie three tractors and then disappeared again into die woods.

Two blue veins had come out on either side of Mrs. Cope's forehead and Mrs. Pritchard observed them with satisfaction. "Like I toljer," she said, "diere ain't a thing you can do about it."

Mrs. Cope ate her dinner hastily, not conscious diat she had her sunhat on. Every time she heard a noise, she jumped up. Mrs. Pritchard came over immediately after dinner and said, "Well, you want to know where they are now?" and smiled in an omniscient rewarded way.

"I want to know at once," Mrs. Cope said, coming to an almost military attention.

"Down to the road, throwing rocks at your mailbox," Mrs. Pritchard said, leaning comfortably in die door. "Done already about knocked it of? its stand."

"Get in the car," Mrs. Cope said.

The child got in too and the three of them drove down die road to the gate. The boys were sitting on the embankment on die odier side of the highway, aiming rocks across die road at die mailbox. Mrs. Cope stopped die car almost directly beneadi diem and looked up out of her window. The diree of diem stared at her as if diey had never seen her before, die large boy widi a sullen glare, die small one glint-eyed and unsmiling, and Powell widi his two-sided glassed gaze hanging vacantly over die crippled destroyer on his shirt.

"Powell," she said, "I'm sure your mother would be ashamed of you," and she stopped and waited for this to make its effect. His face seemed to twist slightly but he continued to look through her at nothing in particular. "Now I've put up with this as long as I can," she said. "I've tried to be nice to you boys. Haven't I been nice to you boys?"

They might have been three statues except that the big one, barely opening his mouth, said, "We're not even on your side the road, lady."

"There ain't a thing you can do about it," Mrs. Pritchard hissed loudly. The child was sitting on the back seat close to the side. She had a furious outraged look on her face but she kept her head drawn back from the window so that they couldn't see her.

Mrs. Cope spoke slowly, emphasizing every word. "I think I have been very nice to you boys. I've fed you twice. Now I'm going into town and if you're still here when I come back, I'll call the sheriff," and with this, she drove off. The child, turning quickly so that she could see out the back window, observed that they had not moved; they had not even turned their heads.

"You done angered them now," Mrs. Pritchard said, "and it ain't any telling what they'll do."

"They'll be gone when we get back," Mrs. Cope said.

Mrs. Pritchard could not stand an anticlimax. She required the taste of blood from time to time to keep her equilibrium. "I known a man oncet that his wife was poisoned by a child she had adopted out of pure kindness," she said. When they returned from town, the boys were not on the embankment and she said, "I would rather to see them than not to see them. When you see them you know what they're doing."

"Ridiculous," Mrs. Cope muttered. "I've scared them and they've gone and now we can forget them." "I ain't forgetting them," Mrs. Pritchard said. "I wouldn't be none surprised if they didn't have a gun in that there suitcase."

Mrs. Cope prided herself on the way she handled the type of mind that Mrs. Pritchard had. When Mrs. Pritchard saw signs and omens, she exposed them calmly for the figments of imagination that they were, but this afternoon her nerves were taut and she said, "Now I've had about enough of this. Those boys are gone and that's that."

"Well, we'll wait and see," Mrs. Pritchard said.

Everything was quiet for the rest of the afternoon but at supper time, Mrs. Pritchard came over to say that she had heard a high vicious laugh pierce out of die bushes near die hog pen. It was an evil laugh, full of calculated meanness, and she had heard it come diree times, herself, distinctly.

"I haven't heard a thing," Mrs. Cope said.

"I look for them to strike just after dark," Mrs. Pritchard said.

That night Mrs. Cope and the child sat on die porch until nearly ten o'clock and nothing happened. The only sounds came from tree frogs and from one whippoorwill who called faster and faster from the same spot of darkness. "They've gone," Mrs. Cope said, "poor things," and she began to tell die child how much diey had to be thankful for, for she said they might have had to live in a development themselves or diey might have been Negroes or they might have been in iron lungs or diey might have been Europeans ridden in boxcars like cattle, and she began a litany of her blessings, in a stricken voice, diat the child, straining her attention for a sudden shriek in die dark, didn't listen to.

There was no sign of diem die next morning either. The fortress line of trees was a hard granite blue, the wind had risen overnight and die sun had come up a pale gold. The season was changing. Even a small change in the weather made Mrs.

Cope diankful, but when die seasons changed she seemed almost frightened at her good fortune in escaping whatever it was diat pursued her. As she sometimes did when one tiling was finished and another about to begin, she turned her attendon to die child who had put on a pair of overalls over her dress and had pulled a man's old felt hat down as far as it would go on her head and was arming herself with two pistols in a decorated holster diat she had fastened around her waist. The hat was very tight and seemed to be squeezing die redness into her face. It came down almost to die tops of her glasses. Mrs. Cope watched her with a tragic look. "Why do you have to look like an idiot?" she asked. "Suppose company were to come? When are you going to grow up? What's going to become of you? I look at you and I want to cry! Sometimes you look like you might belong to Mrs. Pritchard!"

"Leave me be," the child said in a high irritated voice. "Leave me

be. Just leave me be. I ain't you," and she went off to die woods as

if she were stalking out an enemy, her head thrust forward and each hand gripped on a gun.

Mrs. Pritchard came over, sour-humored, because she didn't have anydiing calamitous to report. "I got die misery in my face today," she said, holding on to what she could salvage. "Theseyer teedi. They each one feel like an individual boil."

The child crashed dirough die woods, making the fallen leaves sound ominous under her feet. The sun had risen a little and was only a white hole like an opening for the wind to escape through in a sky a little darker dian itself, and die tops of die trees were black against die glare. "I'm going to get you one by one and beat you black and blue. Line up. LINE UP!" she said and waved one of die pistols at a cluster of long bare-trunked pines, four times her height, as she passed diem. She kept moving, muttering and growling to herself and occasionally hitting out widi one of die guns at a branch diat got in her way. From time to time she stopped to remove die diorn vine diat caught in her shirt and she would say, "Leave me be, I told you. Leave me be," and give it a crack with die pistol and dien stalk on.

Presently she sat down on a stump to cool off but she planted bodi feet carefully and firmly on die ground. She lifted diem and put diem down several times, grinding diem fiercely into die dirt as if she were crushing somediing under her heels. Suddenly she heard a laugh.

She sat up, prickle-skinned. It came again. She heard die sound of splashing and she stood up, uncertain which way to run. She was not far from where diis

patch of woods ended and the back pasture began. She eased toward the pasture, careful not to make a sound, and coming suddenly to die edge of it, she saw die diree boys, not twenty feet away, washing in die cow trough. Their domes were piled against die black valise out of reach of die water mat flowed over die side of die tank. The large boy was standing up and die small one was trying to climb onto his shoulders. Powell was sitting down looking straight ahead dirough glasses diat were splashed widi water. He was not paying any attention to die odier two. The trees must have looked like green waterfalls dirough his wet glasses. The child stood partly hidden behind a pine trunk, the side of her face pressed into the bark. "I wish I lived here I" the little boy shouted, balancing with his knees clutched around the big one's head. "I'm goddam glad I don't," the big boy panted, and jumped up to dislodge him.

Powell sat without moving, without seeming to know that the other two were behind him, and looked straight ahead like a ghost sprung upright in his coffin. "If this place was not here any more," he said, "you would never have to think of it again."

"Listen," the big boy said, sitting down quietly in the water with the little one still moored to his shoulders, "it don't belong to nobody."

"It's ours," the little boy said.

The child behind the tree did not move.

Powell jumped out of the trough and began to run. He ran all the way around the field as if something were after him and as he passed the tank again, the other two jumped out and raced with him, the sun glinting on their long wet bodies. The big one ran the fastest and was the leader. They dashed around the field twice and finally dropped down by their clothes and lay there with their ribs moving up and down. After a while, the big one said hoarsely, "Do you know what I would do with this place if I had the chance?" "No, what?" the little boy said and sat up to give him his full attention.

"I'd build a big parking lot on it, or something," he muttered.

They began to dress. The sun made two white spots on Powell's glasses and blotted out his eyes. "I know what let's do," he said. He took something small from his pocket and showed it to them. For almost a minute they sat looking at what he had in his hand. Then without any more discussion, Powell picked up the suitcase and they got up and moved past the child and entered the woods not ten

feet from where she was standing, slightly away from the tree now, with the imprint of the bark embossed red and white on the side of her face.

She watched with a dazed stare as they stopped and collected all the matches they had between them and began to set the brush on fire. They began to whoop and holler and beat their hands over their mouths and in a few seconds there was a narrow line of fire widening between her and them. While she watched, it reached up from the brush, snatching and biting at the lowest branches of the trees. The wind carried rags of it higher and the boys disappeared shrieking behind it.

She turned and tried to run across the field but her legs were too heavy and she stood there, weighted down with some new unplaced misery that she had never felt before. But finally she began to run.

Mrs. Cope and Mrs. Pritchard were in the field behind the barn when Mrs. Cope saw smoke rising from the woods across the pasture. She shrieked and Mrs. Pritchard pointed up the road to where the child came loping heavily, screaming, "Mama, Mama, they're going to build a parking lot herel"

Mrs. Cope began to scream for the Negroes while Mrs. Pritchard, charged now, ran down the road shouting. Mr. Pritchard came out of the open end of the barn and the two Negroes stopped filling the manure spreader in the lot and started toward Mrs. Cope with their shovels. "Hurry, hurry I" she shouted. "Start throwing dirt on it I" They passed her almost without looking at her and headed off slowly across the field toward the smoke. She ran after them a little **way,** shrilling, "Hurry, hurry, don't you see itl Don't you see itl"

"It'll be there when we git there," Culver said and they thrust their shoulders forward a little and went on at the same pace.

The child came to a stop beside her mother and stared up at her face as if she had never seen it before. It was the face of the new misery she felt, but on her mother it looked old and it looked as if it might have belonged to anybody, a Negro or a European or to Powell himself. The child turned her head quickly, and past the Negroes' ambling figures she could see the column of smoke rising **and** widening unchecked inside the granite line of trees. She stood **taut,** listening, and could just catch in the distance a few wild high **shrieks** of joy as if the prophets were dancing in the fiery furnace, in **the** circle the angel had cleared for them.

The Displaced Person

THE PEACOCK was following Mrs. Shortley up the road to the hill where she meant to stand. Moving one behind the other, they looked like a complete procession. Her arms were folded and as she mounted the prominence, she might have been the giant wife of the countryside, come out at some sign of danger to see what the trouble was. She stood on two tremendous legs, with the grand self-confidence of a mountain, and rose, up narrowing bulges of granite, to two icy blue points of light that pierced forward, surveying everything. She ignored the white afternoon sun which was creeping behind a ragged wall of cloud as if it pretended to be an intruder and cast her gaze down the red clay road that turned off from the highway. The peacock stopped just behind her, his tail—glittering green-gold and blue in the sunlight—lifted just enough so that it would not touch the ground. It flowed out on either side like a floating train and his head on the long blue reed-like neck was drawn back as if his attention were fixed in the distance on something no one else could see. Mrs. Shortley was watching a black car turn through the gate from the highway. Over by the toolshed, about fifteen feet away, tiie two Negroes, Astor and Sulk, had stopped work to watch. They were hidden by a mulberry tree but Mrs. Shortley knew they were there. Mrs. Mclntyre was coming down the steps of her house to meet the car. She had on her largest smile but Mrs. Shortley, even from her distance, could detect a nervous slide in it. These people who were coming were only hired help, like the Shortleys themselves or the Negroes. Yet here was the owner of the place out to welcome them. Here she was, wearing her best clothes and a string of beads, and now bounding forward with her mouth stretched.

The car stopped at the walk just as she did and the priest was the first to get out. He was a long-legged black-suited old man with a white hat on and a collar that he wore backwards, which, Mrs. Shortley knew, was what priests did who wanted to be known as priests. It was this priest who had arranged for these people to come here. He opened the back door of the car and out jumped two children, a boy and a girl, and then, stepping more slowly, a woman in brown, shaped like a peanut. Then the front door opened and out stepped the man, the Displaced Person. He was short and a little sway-backed and wore gold-rimmed spectacles.

Mrs. Shortley's vision narrowed on him and then widened to include the woman and the two children in a group picture. The first thing that struck her as very peculiar was that they looked like other people. Every time she had seen

them in her imagination, the image she had got was of the three bears, walking single file, with wooden shoes on like Dutchmen and sailor hats and bright coats with a lot of buttons. But the woman had on a dress she might have worn herself and the children were dressed like anybody from around. The man had on khaki pants and a blue shirt. Suddenly, as Mrs. Mclntyre held out her hand to him, he bobbed dawn from the waist and kissed it.

Mrs. Shortley jerked her own hand up toward her mouth and then after a second brought it down and rubbed it vigorously on her seat. If Mr. Shortley had tried to kiss her hand, Mrs. Mclntyre would have knocked him into the middle of next week, but then Mr. Shortley wouldn't have kissed her hand anyway. He didn't have time to mess around.

She looked closer, squinting. The boy was in the center of the group, talking. He was supposed to speak the most English because he had learned some in Poland and so he was to listen to his father's Polish and say it in English and then listen to Mrs. Mclntyrc's English and say that in Polish. The priest had told Mrs. Mclntyre hi* name was Rudolph and he was twelve and the girl's name was Sledgewig and she was nine. Sledgewig sounded to Mrs. Shortley like something you would name a bug, or vice versa, as if you named a boy Bollweevil. All of them's last name was something that only they themselves and the priest could pronounce. All she could make out of it was Gobblehook. She and Mrs. Mclntyre had been calling them the Gobblehooks all week while they got ready for them.

There had been a great deal to do to get ready for them because they didn't have anything of their own, not a stick of furniture or a sheet or a dish, and everything had had to be scraped together out of things that Mrs. Mclntyre couldn't use any more herself. They had collected a piece of odd furniture here and a piece there and they had taken some flowered chicken feed sacks and made curtains for the windows, two red and one green, because they had not had enough of the red sacks to go around. Mrs. Mclntyre said she was not made of money and she could not afford to buy curtain*. "They can't talk," Mrs. Shortley said. "You reckon they'll know what colors even is?" and Mrs. Mclntyre had said that after what those people had been through, they should be grateful for anything they could get. She said to think how lucky they were to escape from over there and come to a place like this.

Mrs. Shortley recalled a newsreel she had seen once of a small room piled high widi bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, dieir arms and legs tangled together, a head thrust in here, a head there, a foot, a knee, a part that should have been covered up sticking out, a hand raised clutching nothing. Before you could realize that it was real and take it into your head, the picture changed and a

hollow-sounding voice was saying, "Time marches on!" This was the kind of thing that was happening every day in Europe where they had not advanced as in this country, and watching from her vantage point, Mrs. Shortley had the sudden intuition that the Gobblehooks, like rats with typhoid fleas, could have carried all those murderous ways over the water with them directly to this place. If they had come from where that kind of thing was done to them, who was to say they were not the kind that would also do it to others? The width and breadth of this question nearly shook her. Her stomach trembled as if there had been a slight quake in the heart of the mountain and automatically she moved down from her elevation and went forward to be introduced to them, as if **she** meant to find out at once what they were capable of.

She approached, stomach foremost, head back, arms folded, boots flopping gently against her large legs. About fifteen feet from the gesticulating group, she stopped and made her presence felt by training her gaze on the back of Mrs. Mclntyre's neck. Mrs. Mc-Intyre was a small woman of sixty with a round wrinkled face and red bangs that came almost down to two high orange-colored penciled eyebrows. She had a little doll's mouth and eyes that were **a** soft blue when she opened them wide but more like steel or granite when she narrowed them to inspect a milk can. She had buried one husband and divorced two and Mrs. Shortley respected her as a person nobody had put anything over on yet—except, ha, ha, perhaps the Shortleys. She held out her arm in Mrs. Shortley's direction and said to the Rudolph boy, "And this is Mrs. Shortley. Mr. Shortley is my dairyman. Where's Mr. Shortley?" she asked as his wife began to approach again, her arms still folded. "I want him to meet the Guizacs."

Now it was Guizac. She wasn't calling them Gobblehook to their face. "Chancey's at die barn," Mrs. Shortley said. "He don't have rime to rest himself in the bushes like them niggers over there."

Her look first grazed the tops of the displaced people's heads and then revolved downwards slowly, the way a buzzard glides and drops in the air until it alights on the carcass. She stood far enough away so that the man would not be able to kiss her hand. He looked directly at her with little green eyes and gave her a broad grin that **was** toothless on one side. Mrs. Shortley, without smiling, turned **her** attention to *xhe* little girl who stood by the mother, swinging **her** shoulders from side to side. She had long braided hair in two **looped** pigtails and there was no denying she was a pretty child **even** if she did have a bug's name. She was better looking than **either** Annie Maude or Sarah Mae, Mrs. Shortley's two girls going on fifteen and seventeen but Annie Maude had never got her **growth** and Sarah Mae had a cast in her eye. She compared the foreign boy to

her son, H.C., and H.C. came out far ahead. H.C. **was** twenty years old with her build and eyeglasses. He was going to Bible school now and when he finished he was going to start **him a** church. He had a strong sweet voice for hymns and could **sell** anything. Mrs. Shortley looked at the priest and was reminded that these people did not have an advanced religion. There was no telling what all they believed since none of the foolishness had been reformed out of it. Again she saw the room piled high witli bodies.

The priest spoke in a foreign way himself, English but as if he had a throatful of hay. He had a big nose and a bald rectangular face and head. While she was observing him, his large mouth dropped open and with a stare behind her, he said, "Arrrrrrr!" and pointed.

Mrs. Shortley spun around. The peacock was standing a few feet behind her, with his head slightly cocked.

"What a beauti-ful birdrrrdl" the priest murmured.

"Another mouth to feed," Mrs. Mclntyre said, glancing in the peafowl's direction. "And when does he raise his splendid tail?" asked the priest. "Just when it suits him," she said. "There used to be twenty or

thirty of those things on the place but I've let them die off. I don't like to hear them scream in the middle of die night."

"So beauti-ful," the priest said. "A tail full of suns," and he crept forward on tiptoe and looked down on the bird's back where die polished gold and green design began. The peacock stood still as if he had just come down from some sun-drenched height to be a vision for them all. The priest's homely red face hung over him, glowing with pleasure.

Mrs. Shortley's mouth had drawn acidly to one side. "Nothing but a peachicken," she muttered.

Mrs. Mclntyre raised her orange-eyebrows and exchanged a look with her to indicate that the old man was in his second childhood. "Well, we must show the Guizacs their new home," she said impatiently and she herded them into the car again. The peacock stepped off toward the mulberry tree where the two Negroes were hiding and the priest turned his absorbed face away and got in the car and drove the displaced people down to the shack they were to occupy.

Mrs. Shortley waited until the car was out of sight and then she made her way circuitously to the mulberry tree and stood about ten feet behind the two Negroes, one an old man holding a bucket half full of calf feed and die other a yellowish boy with a short woodchuck-like head pushed into a rounded felt hat. "Well," she said slowly, "yawl have looked long enough. What you think about them?"

The old man, Astor, raised himself. "We been watching," he said as if this would be news to her. "Who they now?" "They come from over the water," Mrs. Shortley said with a wave of her arm. "They're what is called Displaced Persons." "Displaced Persons," he said. "Well now. I declare. What do that mean?"

"It means they ain't where they were born at and there's nowhere for diem to go—like if you was run out of here and wouldn't nobody have you."

"It seem like they here, though," the old man said in a reflective voice. "If *they* here, they somewhere."

"Sho is," the other agreed. "They here."

The illogic of Negro-thinking always irked Mrs. Shortley. "They ain't where they belong to be at," she said. "They belong to be back over yonder where everything is still like they been used to. Over here it's more advanced than where they come from. But yawl better look out now," she said and nodded her head. "There's about ten million billion more just like them and I know what Mrs. Mclntyre said."

"Say what?" the young one asked. "Places are not easy to get nowadays, for white or black, but I reckon I heard what she stated to me," she said in a sing-song voice.

"You liable to hear most anything," the old man remarked, leaning forward as if he were about to walk off but holding himself suspended.

"I heard her say, 'This is going to put the Fear of die Lord into those shiftless niggers!'" Mrs. Shortley said in a ringing voice. The old man started off. "She say something like that every now and then," he said. "Ha. Ha. Yes indeed." "You better get on in diat barn and help Mr. Shortley," she said to the other one. "What you reckon she pays you for?" "He the one sont me out," the Negro muttered. "He the one gimme something else to do." "Well you better get to doing it tlien," she said and stood there

until he moved off. Then she stood a while longer, reflecting, her unseeing eyes directly in front of the peacock's tail. He had jumped into the tree and his tail hung in front of her, full of fierce planets with eyes that were each ringed in green and set against a sun that was gold in one second's light and salmon-colored in the next. She might have been looking at a map of the universe but she didn't notice it any more than she did the spots of sky that cracked the dull green of the tree. She was having an inner vision instead. She was seeing the ten million billion of them pushing their way into new places over here and herself, a giant angel with wings as wide as a house, telling the Negroes that they would

have to find another place. She turned herself in the direction of the barn, musing on this, her expression lofty and satisfied.

She approached the barn from an oblique angle that allowed her a look in the door before she could be seen herself. Mr. Chancey Shortley was adjusting the last milking machine on a large black and white spotted cow near the entrance, squatting at her heels. There was about a half-inch of cigarette adhering to the center of his lower lip. Mrs. Shortley observed it minutely for half a second. "If she seen or heard of you smoking in this barn, she would blow a fuse," she said.

Mr. Shortley raised a sharply rutted face containing a washout under each cheek and two long crevices eaten down both sides of his blistered mouth. "You gonter be the one to tell her?" he asked.

"She's got a nose of her own," Mrs. Shortley said.

Mr. Shortley, without appearing-to give the feat any consideration, lifted the cigarette stub with the sharp end of his tongue, drew it into his mouth, closed his lips tightly, rose, stepped out, gave his wife a good round appreciative stare, and spit the smoldering butt into the grass.

"Aw Chancey," she said, "haw haw," and she dug a little hole for it with her toe and covered it up. This trick of Mr. Shortley's was actually his way of making love to her. When he had done his courting, he had not brought a guitar to strum or anything pretty for her to keep, but had sat on her porch steps, not saying a word, imitating a paralyzed man propped up to enjoy a cigarette. When the cigarette got the proper size, he would turn his eyes to her and open his mouth and draw in the butt and then sit there as if he had swallowed it, looking at her with the most loving look anybody could imagine. It nearly drove her wild and every time he did it, she wanted to pull his hat down over his eyes and hug him to death.

"Well," she said, going into the barn after him, "the Gobblehooks have come and she wants you to meet them, says, 'Where's Mr. Shortley?' and I says, 'He don't have time . . .' "

"Tote up them weights," Mr. Shortley said, squatting to the cow again.

"You reckon he can drive a tractor when he don't know English ?" she asked. "I don't think she's going to get her money's worth out of them. That boy can talk but he looks delicate. The one can work can't talk and the one can talk can't work. She ain't any better off than if she had more niggers."

"I rather have a nigger if it was me," Mr. Shortley said.

"She says it's ten million more like them, Displaced Persons, she says that there priest can get her all she wants." "She better quit messin with that there priest," Mr. Shortley said. "He don't look smart," Mrs. Shortley said, "—kind of foolish."

"I ain't going to have the Pope of Rome tell me how to run no dairy," Mr. Shortley said.

"They ain't Eye-talians, they're Poles," she said. "From Poland where all them bodies were stacked up at. You remember all them bodies?"

"I give them three weeks here," Mr. Shortley said.

Three weeks later Mrs. Mclntyre and Mrs. Shortley drove to the **cane** bottom to see Mr. Guizac start to operate the silage cutter, a new machine that Mrs. Mclntyre had just bought because she said, **for** the first time, she had somebody who could operate it. Mr. Guizac could drive a tractor, use the rotary hay-baler, the silage cutter, the combine, the letz mill, or any other machine she had on **the** place. He was an expert mechanic, a carpenter, and a mason. He was thrifty and energetic. Mrs. Mclntyre said she figured he **would** save her twenty dollars a month on repair bills alone. She **taid** getting him was the best day's work she had ever done in her **life.** He could work milking machines and he was scrupulously **clean.** He did not smoke.

She parked her car on the edge of the cane field and they got out. Sulk, the young Negro, was attaching die wagon to the cutter and Mr. Guizac was attaching the cutter to the tractor. He finished first and pushed the colored boy out of the way and attached die wagon to die cutter himself, gesticulating widi a bright angry face when he wanted the hammer or the screwdriver. Nothing was done quick enough to suit him. The Negroes made him nervous.

The week before, he had come upon Sulk at die dinner hour, sneaking with a croker sack into die pen where die young turkeys were. He had watched him take a frying-size turkey from die lot and thrust it in the sack and put the sack under his coat. Then he had followed him around the barn, jumped on him, dragged him to Mrs. Mclntyre's back door and had acted out die enure scene for her, while the Negro muttered and grumbled and said God might strike him dead if he had been stealing any turkey, he had only been taking it to put some black shoe polish on its head because it had the sorehead. God might strike him dead if diat was not die truth before Jesus. Mrs. Mclntyre told him to go put die turkey back and then she was a long time explaining to the Pole diat all Negroes would steal. She finally had to call Rudolph and tell him in English and have him tell his father in Polish, and Mr. Guizac had gone off with a startled disappointed face.

Mrs. Shortley stood by hoping there would be trouble with die silage machine but there was none. All of Mr. Guizac's motions were quick and accurate. He jumped on the tractor like a monkey and maneuvered die big orange cutter into the cane; in a second die silage was spurting in a green jet out of the pipe into the

wagon. He went jolting down die row until his disappeared from sight and the noise became remote.

Mrs. Mclntyre sighed widi pleasure. "At last," she said, "I've got somebody I can depend on. For years I've been fooling with sorry people. Sorry people. Poor white trash and niggers," she muttered. "They've drained me dry. Before you all came I had Ringfields and Collins and Jarrells and Perkins and Pinkins and Herrins and God knows what all else and not a one of diem left widiout taking something off this place diat didn't belong to diem. Not a one!"

Mrs. Shortley could listen to this with composure because she knew that if Mrs. Mclntyre had considered her trash, they couldn't have talked about trashy people together. Neither of them approved of trash. Mrs. Mclntyre continued with the monologue that Mrs. Shortley had heard oftentimes before. "I've been running this place for thirty years," she said, looking with a deep frown out over the field, "and always just barely making it. People think you're made of money. I have taxes to pay. I have the insurance to keep up. I have the repair bills. I have the feed bills." It all gathered up and she stood with her chest lifted and her small hands gripped around **her** elbows. "Ever since the Judge died," she said, "I've barely been making ends meet and they all take something when they leave. The niggers don't leave—they stay and steal. A nigger thinks anybody is rich he can steal from and that white trash thinks anybody is rich who can afford to hire people as sorry as they are. And all I've got is the dirt under my feet!"

You hire and fire, Mrs. Shortley thought, but she didn't always say what she thought. She stood by and let Mrs. Mclntyre say it all out to the end but this time it didn't end as usual. "But at last I'm saved!" Mrs. Mclntyre said. "One fellow's misery is die other fellow's gain. That man there," and she pointed where the Displaced Person had disappeared, "—he has to work! He wants to work!" She turned to Mrs. Shortley with her bright wrinkled face. "That man is my salvation!" she said.

Mrs. Shortley looked straight ahead as if her vision penetrated the cane and the hill and pierced through to the other side. "I would suspicion salvation got from the devil," she said in a slow detached way.

"Now what do you mean by that?" Mrs. Mclntyre asked, looking at **her** sharply.

Mrs. Shortley wagged her head but would not say anything else. **The** fact was she had nothing else to say for this intuition had only at that instant come to her. She had never given much thought to **the** devil for she felt that religion was essentially for those people **who** didn't have die brains to avoid evil without it. For people like **herself,** for people of gumption, it was a social occasion providing **the** opportunity to sing; but if she had ever given it much diought, **she**

would have considered the devil die head of it and God the hanger-on. With the coming of these displaced people, she was obliged to give new thought to a good many things.

"I know what Sledgewig told Annie Maude," she said, and when Mrs. Mclntyre carefully did not ask her what but reached down and broke off a sprig of sassafras to chew, she continued in a way to indicate she was not telling all, "that they wouldn't be able to live long, the four of them, on seventy dollars a month."

"He's worth raising," Mrs. Mclntyre said. "He saves me money."

This was as much as to say that Chancey had never saved her money. Chancey got up at four in the morning to milk her cows, in winter wind and summer heat, and he had been doing it for the last two years. They had been with her the longest she had ever had anybody. The gratitude they got was these hints that she hadn't been saved any money.

"Is Mr. Shortley feeling better today?" Mrs. Mclntyre asked.

Mrs. Shortley thought it was about time she was asking that question. Mr. Shortley had been in bed two days with an attack. Mr. Guizac had taken his place in the dairy in addition to doing his own work. "No he ain't," she said. "That doctor said he was suffering from over-exhaustion."

"If Mr. Shortley is over-exhausted," Mrs. Mclntyre said, "then he must have a second job on the side," and she looked at Mrs. Shortley with almost closed eyes as if she were examining the bot tom of a milk can.

Mrs. Shortley did not say a word but her dark suspicion grew like a black thunder cloud. The fact was that Mr. Shortley did have a second job on the side and that, in a free country, this was none of Mrs. Mclntyre's business. Mr. Shortley made whisky. He had a small still back in the farthest reaches of the place, on Mrs. Mclntyre's land to be sure, but on land that she only owned and did not cultivate, on idle land that was not doing anybody any good. Mr. Shortley was not afraid of work. He got up at four in the morn ing and milked her cows and in the middle of the day when he was supposed to be resting, he was off attending to his still. Not every man would work like that. The Negroes knew about his still but he knew about theirs so there had never been any disagreeableness be tween them. But with foreigners on the place, with people who were all eyes and no understanding, who had come from a place continually fighting, where the religion had not been reformed—with tliis kind of people, you had to be on the lookout every minute. She thought there ought to be a law against them.

There was no reason they couldn't stay over there and take die places of some of the people who had been killed in their wars and butcherings.

"What's furthermore," she said suddenly, "Sledgewig said as soon as her papa saved the money, he was going to buy him a used car. Once they get them a used car, they'll leave you."

"I can't pay him enough for him to save money," Mrs. Mclntyre said. "I'm not worrying about that. Of course," she said then, "if Mr. Shortley got incapacitated, I would have to use Mr. Guizac in die dairy all the time and I would have to pay him more. He doesn't smoke," she said, and it was the fifth time within the week that she had pointed this out.

"It is no man," Mrs. Shortley said emphatically, "that works as hard as Chancey, or is as easy with a cow, or is more of a Christian," and she folded her arms and her gaze pierced the distance. The noise of the tractor and cutter increased and Mr. Guizac appeared coming around the other side of die cane row. "Which can not be said about everybody," she muttered. She wondered whether, if the Pole found Chancey's still, he would know what it was. The trouble widi these people was, you couldn't tell what they knew. Every time Mr. Guizac smiled, Europe stretched out in Mrs. Shortley's imagination, mysterious and evil, the devil's experiment station.

The tractor, the cutter, the wagon passed, rattling and rumbling and grinding before diem. "Think how long that would have taken widi men and mules to do it," Mrs. Mclntyre shouted. "We'll get this whole bottom cut within two days at this rate."

"Maybe," Mrs. Shortley muttered, "if don't no terrible accident occur." She diought how the tractor had made mules worthless. Nowadays you couldn't give away a mule. The next thing to go, **she** reminded herself, will be niggers.

In die afternoon she explained what was going to happen to them to Astor and Sulk who were in the cow lot, filling the manure spreadtr. She sat down next to the block of salt under a small shed, **her** stomach in her lap, her arms on top of it. "All you colored people better look out," she said. "You know how much you can get for a

e. "Nothing, no indeed," the old man said, "not one thing." "Before it was

a tractor," she said, "it could be a mule. And before

it was a Displaced Person, it could be a nigger. The time is going to come," she prophesied, "when it won't be no more occasion to speak of a nigger."

The old man laughed politely. "Yes indeed," he said. "Ha ha."

The young one didn't say anything. He only looked sullen but when she had gone in the house, he said, "Big Belly act like she know everything."

"Never mind," the old man said, "your place too low for anybody to dispute

with you for it."

She didn't tell her fears about the still to Mr. Shortley until he was back on the job in the dairy. Then one night after they were in bed, she said, "That man prowls."

Mr. Shortley folded his hands on his bony chest and pretended he was a corpse.

"Prowls," she continued and gave him a sharp kick in the side with her knee. "Who's to say what they know and don't know? Who's to say if he found it he wouldn't go right to her and tell? How you know they don't make liquor in Europe? They drive tractors. They got them all kinds of machinery. Answer me."

"Don't worry me now," Mr. Shortley said. "I'm a dead man."

"It's them little eyes of his that's foreign," she muttered. "And that way he's got of shrugging." She drew her shoulders up and shrugged several times. "How come he's got anything to shrug about?" she asked.

"If everybody was as dead as I am, nobody would have no trouble," Mr. Shortley said.

"That priest," she muttered and was silent for a minute. Then she said, "In Europe they probably got some different way to make liquor but I reckon they know all the ways. They're full of crooked ways. They never have advanced or reformed. They got the same religion as a thousand years ago. It could only be the devil responsible for that. Always righting amongst each other. Disputing. And then get us into it. Ain't they got us into it twict already and we ain't got no more sense than to go over there and settle it for them and then they come on back over here and snoop around and find your still and go straight to her. And liable to kiss her hand any minute. Do you hear me?"

"No," Mr. Shortley said.

"And I'll tell you another thing," she said. "I wouldn't be a tall surprised if he don't know everything you say, whether it be in English or not."

"I don't speak no other language," Mr. Shortley murmured.

"I suspect," she said, "that before long there won't be no more niggers on this place. And I tell you what. I'd rather have niggers than them Poles. And what's furthermore, I aim to take up for the niggers when the time comes. When Gobblehook first come here, you recollect how he shook their hands, like he didn't know the difference, like he might have been as black as them, but when it come to finding out Sulk was taking turkeys, he gone on and told her. I known he was taking turkeys. I could have told her myself."

Mr. Shortley was breathing softly as if he were asleep.

"A nigger don't know when he has a friend," she said. "And I'll tell you

another thing. I get a heap out of Sledgewig. Sledgewig said that in Poland they lived in a brick house and one night a **man** come and told them to get out of it before daylight. Do you believe they ever lived in a brick house?

"Airs," she said. "That's just airs. A wooden house is good enough for me. Chancey," she said, "turn thisaway. I hate to see niggers mistreated and run out. I have a heap of pity for niggers **and** poor folks. Ain't I always had?" she asked. "I say ain't I always been a friend to niggers and poor folks?

"When the time comes," she said, "I'll stand up for the niggers **and** that's that. I ain't going to see that priest drive out all die niggers."

Mrs. Mclntyre bought a new drag harrow and a tractor with a power lift because she said, for the first time, she had someone who **could** handle machinery. She and Mrs. Shortley had driven to the **back** field to inspect what he had harrowed the day before. "That's **been** done beautifully I" Mrs. Mclntyre said, looking out over the **red** undulating ground.

Mrs. Mclntyre had changed since die Displaced Person had been working for her and Mrs. Shortley had observed the change very closely: she had begun to act like somebody who was getting rich secretly and she didn't confide in Mrs. Shortley the way she used to. Mrs. Shortley suspected that the priest was at the bottom of the change. They were very slick. First he would get her into his Church and then he would get his hand in her pocketbook. Well, Mrs. Shortley thought, the more fool she! Mrs. Shortley had a secret herself. She knew something the Displaced Person was doing that would floor Mrs. Mclntyre. "I still say he ain't going to work forever for seventy dollars a month," she murmured. She intended to keep her secret to herself and Mr. Shortley.

"Well," Mrs. Mclntyre said, "I may have to get rid of some of this other help so I can pay him more."

Mrs. Shortley nodded to indicate she had known this for some time. "I'm not saying those niggers ain't had it coming," she said. "But they do the best they know how. You can always tell a nigger what to do and stand by until he does it."

"That's what the Judge said," Mrs. Mclntyre said and looked at her with approval. The Judge was her first husband, the one who had left her the place. Mrs. Shortley had heard that she had married him when she was thirty and he was seventy-five, thinking she would be rich as soon as he died, but the old man was a scoundrel and when his estate was settled, they found he didn't have a nickel. All he left her were the fifty acres and the house. But she always spoke of him in a reverent way and quoted his sayings, such as, "One fellow's misery is the other fellow's gain," and "The devil you know is better than the devil you

don't."

"However," Mrs. Shortley remarked, "the devil you know is better than the devil you don't," and she had to turn away so that Mrs. Mclntyre would not see her smile. She had found out what the Dis placed Person was up to through the old man, Astor, and she had not told anybody but Mr. Shortley. Mr. Shortley had risen straight up in bed like Lazarus from the tomb.

"Shut your mouth!" he had said.

"Yes," she had said.

"Naw!" Mr. Shortley had said.

"Yes," she had said.

Mr. Shortley had fallen back flat.

"The Pole don't know any better," Mrs. Shortley had said. "I reckon that priest is putting him up to it is all. I blame the priest."

The priest came frequently to see the Guizacs and he would always stop in and visit Mrs. Mclntyre too and they would walk around the place and she would point out her improvements and listen to his rattling talk. It suddenly came to Mrs. Shortley that he was trying to persuade her to bring another Polish family onto the place. With two of them here, there would be almost nothing spoken but Polish! The Negroes would be gone and there would be the two families against Mr. Shortley and herself! She began to imagine a war of words, to see the Polish words and the English words coming at each other, stalking forward, not sentences, just words, gabble gabble gabble, flung out high and shrill and stalking forward and then grappling with each other. She saw the Polish words, dirty and all-knowing and unreformed, flinging mud on the clean English Words until everything was equally dirty. She saw them all piled up in a room, all the dead dirty words, theirs and hers too, piled up like the naked bodies in the newsreel. God save me, she cried silently, from the stinking power of Satan! And she started from that day to read her Bible with a new attention. She poured over the Apocalypse and began to quote from the Prophets and before long she had come to a deeper understanding of her existence. She saw plainly that the meaning of the world was a mystery that had been planned and she was not surprised to suspect that she had a special part in the plan because she was strong. She saw that the Lord God Almighty had created the strong people to do what had to be done and she felt that she would be ready when she was called. Right now she felt that her business was to watch the priest.

His visits irked her more and more. On the last one, he went about picking up feathers off the ground. He found two peacock feathers and four or five turkey feathers and an old brown hen feather and took them off with him like a bouquet.

This foolish-acting did not deceive Mrs. Shortley any. Here he was: leading foreigners over in hordes to places that were not theirs, to cause disputes, to uproot niggers, to plant the Whore of Babylon in the midst of the righteous! Whenever he came on the place, she hid herself behind something and watched until he left.

It was on a Sunday afternoon that she had her vision. She had gone to drive in the cows for Mr. Shortley who had a pain in his knee and she was walking slowly through the pasture, her arms folded, her eyes on the distant low-lying clouds that looked like rows and rows of white fish washed up on a great blue beach. She paused after an incline to heave a sigh of exhaustion for she had an immense weight to carry around and she was not as young as she used to be. At times she could feel her heart, like a child's fist, clenching and unclenching inside her chest, and when the feeling came, it stopped her thought altogether and she would go about like a large hull of herself, moving for no reason; but she gained this incline without a tremor and stood at the top of it, pleased with herself. Suddenly while she watched, the sky folded back in two pieces like the curtain to a stage and a gigantic figure stood facing her. It was the color of the sun in the early afternoon, white-gold. It was of no definite shape but there were fiery wheels with fierce dark eyes in them, spinning rapidly all around it. She was not able to tell if the figure was going forward or backward because its magnificence was so great. She shut her eyes in order to look at it and it turned blood-red and the wheels turned white. A voice, very resonant, said the one word, "Prophesy!"

She stood there, tottering slightly but still upright, her eyes shut tight and her fists clenched and her straw sun hat low on her forehead. "The children of wicked nations will be butchered," she said in a loud voice. "Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand. Who will remain whole? Who will remain whole? Who?"

Presently she opened her eyes. The sky was full of white fish carried lazily on their sides by some invisible current and pieces of the sun, submerged some distance beyond them, appeared from time to time as if they were being washed in the opposite direc tion. Woodenly she planted one foot in front of the other until she had crossed the pasture and reached the lot. She walked through the barn like one in a daze and did not speak to Mr. Shortley. She

continued up the road until she saw the priest's car parked in front of Mrs. Mclntyre's house. "Here again," she muttered. "Come to destroy."

Mrs. Mclntyre and the priest were walking in the yard. In order not to meet them face to face, she turned to the left and entered the feed house, a single-room shack piled on one side with flowered sacks of scratch feed. There were spilled oyster shells in one corner and a few old dirty calendars on the wall, advertising calf feed and various patent medicine remedies. One showed a bearded gentleman in a frock coat, holding up a bottle, and beneath his feet was the inscription, "I have been made regular by this marvelous discovery." Mrs. Shortley had always felt close to this man as if he were some distinguished person she was acquainted with but now her mind was on nothing but the dangerous presence of the priest. She stationed herself at a crack between two boards where she could look out and see him and Mrs. Mclntyre strolling toward the turkey brooder, which was placed just outside the feed house.

"Arrrrrl" he said as they approached the brooder. "Look at the litde biddies!" and he stooped and squinted through the wire.

Mrs. Shortley's mouth twisted.

"Do you think the Guizacs will want to leave me?" Mrs. Mclntyre asked. "Do you think they'll go to Chicago or some place like that?" "And why should they do that now?" asked the priest, wiggling his finger at a turkey, his big nose close to the wire.

"Money," Mrs. Mclntyre said.

"Arrrr, give them some morrre then," he said indifferently. "They have to get along." "So do I," Mrs. Mclntyre muttered. "It means I'm going to have to get rid of some of these others." "And arrre the Shortleys satisfactory?" he inquired, paying more attention to the turkeys than to her. "Five times in the last month I've found Mr. Shortley smoking in the barn," Mrs. Mclntyre said. "Five times."

"And arrre the Negroes any better?"

"They lie and steal and have to be watched all the time," she said.

"Tsk, tsk," he said. "Which will you discharge?" . "I've decided to give Mr. Shortley his month's notice tomorrow," Mrs. Mclntyre said. The priest scarcely seemed to hear her he was so busy wiggling his finger inside the wire. Mrs. Shortley sat down on an open sack of laying mash with a dead thump that sent feed dust clouding up around her. She found herself looking straight ahead at the opposite wall where the gentleman on the

calendar was holding up his marvelous discovery but she didn't see him. She looked ahead as if she saw nothing whatsoever. Then she rose and ran to her house. Her face was an almost volcanic red.

She opened all the drawers and dragged out boxes and old battered suitcases from under the bed. She began to unload the drawers into the boxes, all the time without pause, without taking off the sunhat she had on her head. She set the two girls to doing the same. When Mr. Shortley came in, she did not even look at him but merely pointed one arm at him while she packed with the other. "Bring the car around to the back door," she said. "You ain't waiting to be fired!"

Mr. Shortley had never in his life doubted her omniscience. He perceived the entire situation in half a second and, with only a sour scowl, retreated out the door and went to drive the automobile around to the back.

They tied the two iron beds to the top of the car and the two rocking chairs inside the beds and rolled the two mattresses up between the rocking chairs. On top of this they tied a crate of chickens. They loaded the inside of the car with the old suitcases and boxes, leaving a small space for Annie Maude and Sarah Mae. It took them the rest of the afternoon and half the night to do this but Mrs. Shortley was determined that they would leave before four o'clock in the morning, that Mr. Shortley should not adjust another milking machine on this place. All the time she had been working, her face was changing rapidly from red to white and back again.

Just before dawn, as it began to drizzle rain, they were ready to leave. They all got in the car and sat there cramped up between boxes and bundles and rolls of bedding. The square black auto mobile moved off with more than its customary grinding noises as if it were protesting the load. In the back, the two long bony yellow-haired girls were sitting on a pile of boxes and there was a beagle hound puppy and a cat with two kittens somewhere under the blankets. The car moved slowly, like some overfreighted leaking ark, away from their shack and past the white house where Mrs. Mclntyre was sleeping soundly—hardly guessing that her cows would not be milked by Mr. Shortley diat morning—and past the Pole's shack on top of the hill and on down the road to the gate where the two Negroes were walking, one behind the other, on their way to help with the milking. They looked straight at the car and its occupants but even as the dim yellow headlights lit up their faces, they politely did not seem to see anything, or anyhow, to attach significance to what was there. The loaded car might have been passing mist in the early morning half-light. They continued up the road at die same even pace without looking back.

A dark yellow sun was beginning to rise in a sky that was the same slick dark

gray as the highway. The fields stretched away, stiff and weedy, on either side. "Where we goin?" Mr. Shortley asked for the first time.

Mrs. Shortley sat with one foot on a packing box so that her knee was pushed into her stomach. Mr. Shortley's elbow was almost under her nose and Sarah Mae's bare left foot was sticking over the front seat, touching her ear.

"Where we goin?" Mr. Shortley repeated and when she didn't answer again, he turned and looked at her.

Fierce heat seemed to be swelling slowly and fully into her face as if it were welling up now for a final assault. She was sitting in an erect way in spite of the fact that one leg was twisted under her and one knee was almost into her neck, but there was a peculiar lack of light in her icy blue eyes. All die vision in them might have been turned around, looking inside her. She suddenly grabbed Mr. Shortley's elbow and Sarah Mae's foot at the same time and began to tug and pull on them as if she were trying to fit the two extra limbs onto herself.

Mr. Shortley began to curse and quickly stopped die car and Sarah Mae yelled to quit but Mrs. Shortley apparently intended to rearrange the whole car at once. She thrashed forward and backward, clutching at everything she could get her hands on and hugging it to herself, Mr. Shortley's head, Sarah Mae's leg, the cat, a wad of white bedding, her own big moon-like knee; then all at once her fierce expression faded into a look of astonishment and her grip on what she had loosened. One of her eyes drew near to the other and seemed to collapse quietly and she was still.

The two girls, who didn't know what had happened to her, began to say, "Where we goin, Ma? Where we goin?" They thought she was playing a joke and that their father, staring straight ahead at her, was imitating a dead man. They didn't know that she had had a great experience or ever been displaced in the world from all that belonged to her. They were frightened by the gray slick road before them and they kept repeating in higher and higher voices, "Where we goin, Ma ? Where we goin ?" while their mother, her huge body rolled back still against the seat and her eyes like blue-painted glass, seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country.

II

"Well," Mrs. Mclntyre said to the old Negro, "we can get along without them. We've seen them come and seen them go—black and white." She was standing in the calf barn while he cleaned it and she held a rake in her hand and now and then pulled a corn cob from a corner or pointed to a soggy spot that he had missed. When she discovered the Shortleys were gone, she was delighted as it

meant she wouldn't have to fire them. The people she hired always left her—because they were that kind of people. Of all the families she had had, the Shortleys were the best if she didn't count the Dis placed Person. They had been not quite trash; Mrs. Shortley was a good woman, and she would miss her but as the Judge used to **say,** you couldn't have your pie and eat it too, and she was satisfied **with** the D.P. "We've seen them come and seen them go," she repeated with satisfaction.

"And me and you," the old man said, stooping to drag his hoc un der a feed rack, "is still here."

She caught exactly what he meant her to catch in his tone. **Bars** of sunlight fell from the cracked ceiling across his back and **cut** him in three distinct parts. She watched his long hands clenched around the hoe and his crooked old profile pushed close to **them.** You might have been here *before* I was, she said to herself, but **it's** mighty likely I'll be here when you're gone. "I've spent half my life fooling with worthless people," she said in a severe voice, "but now I'm through."

"Black and white," he said, "is the same."

"I am through," she repeated and gave her dark smock that she had thrown over her shoulders like a cape a quick snatch at the neck. She had on a broad-brimmed black straw hat that had cost her twenty dollars twenty years ago and that she used now for a sunhat. "Money is the root of all evil," she said. "The Judge said so every day. He said he deplored money. He said the reason you niggers were so uppity was because there was so much money in circulation."

The old Negro had known the Judge. "Judge say he long for the day when he be too poor to pay a nigger to work," he said. "Say when that day come, the world be back on its feet."

She leaned forward, her hands on her hips and her neck stretched and said, "Well that day has almost come around here and I'm telling each and every one of you: you better look sharp. I don't have to put up with foolishness any more. I have somebody now who *has* to work!"

The old man knew when to answer and when not. At length he said, "We seen them come and we seen them go." "However, the Shortleys were not the worst by far," she said. "I well remember those Garrits."

"They was before them Collinses," he said.

"No, before the Ringfields."

"Sweet Lord, them Ringfields!" he murmured.

"None of that kind *want* to work," she said.

"We seen them come and we seen them go," he said as if this were a refrain. "But we ain't never had one before," he said, bending himself up until he faced her, "like what we got now." He was cinnamon-colored with eyes that were so blurred with age that they seemed to be hung behind cobwebs.

She gave him an intense stare and held it until, lowering his hands on the hoe, he bent down again and dragged a pile of shavings alongside the wheelbarrow. She said stiffly, "He can wash out that barn in the time it took Mr. Shortley to make up his mind he had to do it"

"He from Pole," the old man muttered.

"From Poland." "In Pole it ain't like it is here," he said. "They got different ways of doing," and he began to mumble unintelligibly. "What are you saying?" she said. "If you have anything to say about him, say it and say it aloud." He was silent, bending his knees precariously and edging the **rake** along the underside of the trough. "If you know anything he's done that he shouldn't, I expect you to report it to me," she said. "It warn't like it was what he should ought or oughtn't," he muttered. "It was like what nobody else don't do." "You don't have anything against him," she said shortly, "and he's here to stay." "We ain't never had one like him before is all," he murmured and gave his polite laugh.

"Times are changing," she said. "Do you know what's happening to this world? It's swelling up. It's getting so full o£ **people** that only the smart thrifty energetic ones are going to survive," **and** she tapped the words, smart, thrifty, and energetic out on **the** palm of her hand. Through the far end of the stall she could **see** down the road to where the Displaced Person was standing in the open barn door with the green hose in his hand. There was **a** certain stiffness about his figure that seemed to make it necessary **for** her to approach him slowly, even in her thoughts. She had **decided** this was because she couldn't hold an easy conversation with **him.** Whenever she said anything to him, she found herself **shouting** and nodding extravagantly and she would be conscious that **one** of the Negroes was leaning behind the nearest shed, watching.

"No indeed!" she said, sitting down on one of the feed racks **and** folding her arms, "I've made up my mind that I've had **enough** trashy people on this place to last me a lifetime and I'm not **going** to spend my last years fooling with Shortleys and Ringfields **and** Collins when the world is full of people who *have* to work."

"Howcome they so many extra?" he asked.

"People are selfish," she said. "They have too many **children.**

There's no sense in it any more."

He had picked up the wheelbarrow handles and was backing **out**

tlic door and he paused, half in the sunlight and half out, and stood there chewing his gums as if he had forgotten which direction he wanted to move in.

"What you colored people don't realize," she said, "is that I'm the one around here who holds all the strings together. If you don't work, I don't make any money and I can't pay you. You're all dependent on me but you each and every one act like the shoe is on the other foot."

It was not possible to tell from his face if he heard her. Finally be backed out with the wheelbarrow. "Judge say the devil he know is better than the devil he don't," he said in a clear mutter and trundled off.

She got up and followed him, a deep vertical pit appearing suddenly in the center of her forehead, just under the red bangs. "The Judge has long since ceased to pay the bills around here," she called in a piercing voice.

He was the only one of her Negroes who had known the Judge and he thought this gave him title. He had had a low opinion of Mr. Crooms and Mr. Mclntyre, her other husbands, and in his veiled polite way, he had congratulated her after each of her divorces. When he thought it necessary, he would work under a window where he knew she was sitting and talk to himself, a careful roundabout discussion, question and answer and then refrain. Once she had got up silently and slammed the window down so hard that he had fallen backwards off his feet. Or occasionally he spoke with the peacock. The cock would follow him around the place, his steady eye on the ear of corn that stuck up from the old man's back pocket or he would sit near him and pick himself. Once from the open kitchen door, she had heard him say to the bird, "I remember when it was twenty of you walking about this place and now it's only you and two hens. Crooms it was twelve. Mclntyre it was five. You and two hens now."

And that time she had stepped out of the door onto the porch

and said, "MISTER Crooms and MISTER Mclntyre! And I don't

want to hear you call either of them anything else again. And

you can understand this: when that peachicken dies there won't

be **any** replacements."

She kept the peacock only out of a superstitious fear of annoying the Judge in his grave. He had liked to see them walking around the place for he said they made him feel rich. Of her three husbands, tiie Judge was the one most present to her although he was the only one she had buried. He was in the family graveyard, a little space fenced in the middle of the back cornfield, with his

mother and father and grandfather and three great aunts and two infant cousins. Mr. Crooms, her second, was forty miles away in the state asylum and Mr. Mclntyre, her last, was intoxicated, she supposed, in some hotel room in Florida. But the Judge, sunk in the cornfield with his family, was always at home.

She had married him when he was an old man and because of his money but there had been another reason that she would not admit then, even to herself: she had liked him. He was a dirty snuff-dipping Court House figure, famous all over the county for being rich, who wore hightop shoes, a string tie, a gray suit widi a black stripe in it, and a yellowed panama hat, winter and summer. His teeth and hair were tobacco-colored and his face a clay pink pitted and tracked with mysterious prehistoric-looking marks as if he had been unearthed among fossils. There had been a peculiar odor about him of sweaty fondled bills but he never carried money on him or had a nickel to show. She was his secretary for a few months and the old man with his sharp eye had seen at once that here was a woman who admired him for himself. The three years that he lived after they married were the happiest and most prosperous of Mrs. Mclntyre's life, but when he died his estate proved to be bankrupt. He left her a mortgaged house and fifty acres that he had managed to cut the timber off before he died. It was as if, as the final triumph of a successful life, he had been able to take everything with him.

But she had survived. She had survived a succession of tenant farmers and dairymen that the old man himself would have found hard to outdo, and she had been able to meet the constant drain of a tribe of moody unpredictable Negroes, and she had even managed to hold her own against the incidental bloodsuckers, the cattle dealers and lumber men and the buyers and sellers of anything who drove up in pieced-together trucks and honked in the yard.

She stood slightly reared back with her arms folded under her **smock** and a satisfied expression on her face as she watched the Displaced Person turn off die hose and disappear inside the barn. **She** was sorry that the poor man had been chased out of Poland **and** run across Europe and had had to take up in a tenant shack in **a** strange country, but she had not been responsible for any of **this.** She had had a hard time herself. She knew what it was to **struggle.** People ought to have to struggle. Mr. Guizac had probably **had** everything given to him all the way across Europe and over **here.** He had probably not had to struggle enough. She had given **him** a job. She didn't know if he was grateful or not. She didn't **know** anything about him except diat he did the work. The truth **was** that he was not very real to her yet. He was a kind of miracle **that** she had seen happen and that she talked about but that she **still** didn't believe.

She watched as he came out of the barn and motioned to Sulk, **who** was

coming around the back of the lot. He gesticulated and **then** took something out of his pocket and the two of them stood **looking** at it. She started down the lane toward diem. The Negro's **figure** was slack and tall and he was craning his round head forward in his usual idiotic way. He was a little better than half-witted but **when** diey were like that they were always good workers. The Judge **had** said always hire you a half-witted nigger because they don't **have** sense enough to stop working. The Pole was gesticulating **rapidly.** He left something with the colored boy and dien walked **off and** before she rounded die turn in the lane, she heard die tractor **crank** up. He was on his way to die field. The Negro was still hanging diere, gaping at whatever he had in his hand.

She entered the lot and walked through the barn, looking with **approval** at die wet spotless concrete floor. It was only nine-diirty **and** Mr. Shortley had never got anything washed until eleven. As **she** came out at die odier end, she saw die Negro moving very **slowly** in a diagonal path across the road in front of her, his **eyes** sdll on what Mr. Guizac had given him. He didn't see her **and he** paused and dipped his knees and leaned over his hand, his **tongue** describing little circles. He had a photograph. He lifted one **finger** and traced it lightly over the surface of the picture. Then he looked up and saw her and seemed to freeze, his mouth in a half-grin, his finger lifted.

"Why haven't you gone to the field?" she asked.

He raised one foot and opened his mouth wider while the hand with the photograph edged toward his back pocket.

"What's that?" she said.

"It ain't nothing," he muttered and handed it to her automatically,

It was a photograph of a girl of about twelve in a white dress. She had blond hair with a wreath in it and she looked forward out of light eyes diat were bland and composed. "Who is this child?" Mrs. Mclntyre asked.

"She his cousin," the boy said in a high voice.

"Well what are you doing with it?" she asked.

"She going to mah me," he said in an even higher voice.

"Marry you!" she shrieked.

"I pays half to get her over here," he said. "I pays him three dollar a week. She bigger now. She his cousin. She don't care who **she** mah she so glad to get away from there." The high voice **seemed** to shoot up like a nervous jet of sound and then fall flat as **he** watched her face. Her eyes were the color of blue granite when **the** glare falls on it, but she was not looking at him. She was **looking** down the road where the distant sound of the tractor could be **heard.** "I don't reckon

she goin to come nohow," the boy murmured.

"I'll see that you get every cent of your money back," she **said** in a toneless voice and turned and walked off, holding the photo graph bent in two. There was nothing about her small stiff **figure** to indicate tfiat she was shaken.

As soon as she got in the house, she lay down on her bed **and** shut her eyes and pressed her hand over her heart as if she **woe** trying to keep it in place. Her mouth opened and she made **two** or three dry little sounds. Then after a minute she sat up and **said** aloud, "They're all the same. It's always been like this," and **she fell** back flat again. "Twenty years of being beaten and done **in and** they even robbed his grave!" and remembering that, she **began to** cry quietly, wiping her eyes every now and then with the **hem** of her smock.

What she had thought of was the angel over the Judge's **grave.** This had been a naked granite cherub that the old man had seen in the city one day in a tombstone store window. He had been taken with it at once, partly because its face reminded him of his wife and partly because he wanted a genuine work of art over his grave. He had come home with it sitting on the green plush train seat beside him. Mrs. Mclntyre had never noticed the resemblance to herself. She had always thought it hideous but when the Herrins stole it off the old man's grave, she was shocked and outraged. Mrs. Herrin had diought it very pretty and had walked to **the** graveyard frequently to see it, and when the Herrins left the angel left with them, all but its toes, for the ax old man Herrin **bad** used to break it off with had struck slightly too high. Mrs. Mclntyre had never been able to afford to have it replaced.

When she had cried all she could, she got up and went into the back hail, a closet-like space that was dark and quiet as a chapel and **sat** down on the edge of the Judge's black mechanical chair with **her** elbow on his desk. This was a giant roll-top piece of furniture pocked with pigeon holes full of dusty papers. Old bankbooks and ledgers were stacked in the half-open drawers and there was a **small** safe, empty but locked, set like a tabernacle in the center of it. She had left this part of the house unchanged since the old **man's** time. It was a kind of memorial to him, sacred because he **had** conducted his business here. With the slightest tilt one way or the other, the chair gave a rusty skeletal groan that sounded something like him when he had complained of his poverty. It had **been**

bis first principle to talk as if he were the poorest man in die **world** and she followed it, not only because he had but because it **was** true. When she sat with her intense constricted face turned **toward** the empty safe, she knew diere was nobody poorer in the **world** than she was.

She sat motionless at the desk for ten or fifteen minutes and then as if **she** had gained some strength, she got up and got in her car and

drove to die cornfield.

The road ran dirough a shadowy pine thicket and ended on top

of **a** bill that rolled fan-wise down and up again in a broad expanse **of tassled** green. Mr. Guizac was cutting from die outside of the

field in a circular path to the center where the graveyard was all but

hidden by the corn, and she could see him on the high far side of the slope, mounted on the tractor with the cutter and wagon behind him. From time to time, he had to get off the tractor and climb in the wagon to spread the silage because the Negro had not arrived. She watched impatiently, standing in front of her black coupe with her arms folded under her smock, while he progressed slowly around the rim of the field, gradually getting close enough for her to wave to him to get down. He stopped the machine and jumped off and came running forward, wiping his red jaw with a piece of grease rag.

"I want to talk to you," she said and beckoned him to the edge of the thicket where it was shady. He took off the cap and followed her, smiling, but his smile faded when she turned and faced him. Her eyebrows, thin and fierce as a spider's leg, had drawn together ominously and the deep vertical pit had plunged down from under the red bangs into the bridge of her nose. She removed the bent picture from her pocket and handed it to him silently. Then she stepped back and said, "Mr. Guizac! You would bring this poor innocent child over here and try to marry her to a half-witted thieving black stinking nigger! What kind of a monster are you!"

He took the photograph with a slowly returning smile. "My cousin," he said. "She twelve here. First Communion. Six-ten now."

Monster! she said to herself and looked at him as if she were seeing him for the first time. His forehead and skull were white where they had been protected by his cap but the rest of his face was red and bristled with short yellow hairs. His eyes were like two bright nails behind his gold-rimmed spectacles that had been mended over the nose with haywire. His whole face looked as if it might have been patched together out of several others. "Mr. Guizac," she said,

beginning slowly and then speaking faster until she ended breathless in the middle of a word, "that nigger cannot have a white wife from Europe. You can't talk to a nigger that way. You'll excite him and besides it can't be done. Maybe it can be done in Poland but it can't be done here and you'll have to stop. It's all foolishness. That nigger don't have a grain of sense and you'll *cx*-cite. . ."

"She in camp three year," he said.

"Your cousin," she said in a positive voice, "cannot come over here and marry one of my Negroes."

"She six-ten year," he said. "From Poland. Mamma die, pappa die. She wait in camp. Three camp." He pulled a wallet from his pocket and fingered through it and took out another picture of the same girl, a few years older, dressed in something dark and shapeless. She was standing against a wall with a short woman who apparently had no teeth. "She mamma," he said, pointing to the woman. "She die in two camp."

"Mr. Guizac," Mrs. Mclntyre said, pushing the picture back at him, "I will not have my niggers upset. I cannot run this place without my niggers. I can run it without you but not without diem and if you mention this girl to Sulk again, you won't have a job with me. Do you understand?"

His face showed no comprehension. He seemed to be piecing all these words together in his mind to make a thought.

Mrs. Mclntyre remembered Mrs. Shortley's words: "He understands everything, he only pretends he don't so as to do exactly as he pleases," and her face regained the look of shocked wrath she had begun with. "I cannot understand how a man who calls himself a Christian," she said, "could bring a poor innocent girl over here and marry her to something like that. I cannot understand it. I cannot!" and she shook her head and looked into the distance with a pained blue gaze.

After a second he shrugged and let his arms drop as if he were tired. "She no care black," he said. "She in camp three year."

Mrs. Mclntyre felt a peculiar weakness behind her knees. "Mr. Guizac," she said, "I don't want to have to speak to you about this again. If I do, you'll have to find another place yourself. Do you understand ? "

The patched face did not say. She had the impression that he didn't see her there. "This is my place," she said. "I say who will come here and who won't."

"Ya," he said and put back on his cap. "I am not responsible for die world's misery," she said as an afterthought. "Ya," he said.

"You have a good job. You should be grateful to be here," she added, "but I'm not sure you are." "Ya," he said and gave his little shrug and turned back to the

tractor.

She watched him get on and maneuver the machine into the corn again. When he had passed her and rounded the turn, she climbed to the top of the slope and stood with her arms folded and looked out grimly over the field. "They're all the same," she muttered, "whedier they come from Poland or Tennessee. I've handled Herrins and Ringfields and Shortleys and I can handle a Guizac," and she narrowed her gaze until it closed entirely around the diminishing figure on the tractor as if she were watching him through a gunsight. All her life she had been fighting the world's overflow and now she had it in the form of a Pole. "You're just like all the rest of them," she said, "—only smart and thrifty and energetic but so am I. And this is my place," and she stood there, a small black-hatted, black-smocked figure with an aging cherubic face, and folded her arms as if she were equal to anything. But her heart wat beating as if some interior violence had already been done to her. She opened her eyes to include the whole field so that the figure on the tractor was no larger than a grasshopper in her widened view.

She stood there for some time. There was a slight breeze and die corn trembled in great waves on both sides of die slope. The big cutter, with its monotonous roar, continued to shoot it pulverized into the wagon in a steady spurt of fodder. By nightfall, the Displaced Person would have worked his way around and around until there would be nothing on eitiier side of the two hills but die stubble, and down in die center, risen like a little island, the graveyard where die Judge lay grinning under his desecrated monument.

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The priest, with his long bland face supported on one finger, had been talking for ten minutes about Purgatory while Mrs. Mclntyrc squinted furiously at him from an opposite chair. They were drinking ginger ale on her front porch and she kept rattling die ice in her glass, rattling her beads, rattling her bracelet like an impatient pony jingling its harness. There is no moral obligation to keep him, she was saying under her breath, there is absolutely no moral obligation. Suddenly she lurched up and her voice fell across his brogue like a drill into a mechanical saw. "Listen," she said, "I'm not theological. I'm practical! I want to talk to you about something practical!"

"Arrrrrrr," he groaned, grating to a halt.

She had put at least a finger of whiskey in her own ginger ale so that she

would be able to endure his full-length visit and she sat down awkwardly, finding the chair closer to her than she had expected. "Mr. Guizac is not satisfactory," she said.

The old man raised his eyebrows in mock wonder. "He's extra," she said. "He doesn't fit in. I have to have somebody who fits in."

The priest carefully turned his hat on his knees. He had a little trick of waiting a second silently and then swinging the conversation back into his own padis. He was about eighty. She had never known a priest until she had gone to see this one on the business of get ting her the Displaced Person. After he had got her die Pole, he had used tiie business introduction to try to convert her—just as she had supposed he would.

"Give him time," the old man said. "He'll learn to fit in. Where it that beautiful birrrrd of yours?" he asked and then said, "Arrrrr, I **tee** him I" and stood up and looked out over the lawn where the peacock and die two hens were stepping at a strained attention, their long necks ruffled, the cock's violent blue and the hens' silver-**green,** glinting in the late afternoon sun.

"Mr. Guizac," Mrs. Mclntyre continued, bearing down with a flat **steady** voice, "is very efficient. **I'll** admit tiiat. But he doesn't under stand.how to get on with my niggers and they don't like him. I can't have my niggers run off. And I don't like his attitude. He's not **the** least grateful for being here."

The priest had his hand on the screen door and he opened it, **ready to** make his escape. "Arrrr, I must be off," he murmured.

"I tell you if I had a white man who understood the Negroes, I'd **have to** let Mr. Guizac go," she said and stood up again.

He turned then and looked her in the face. "He has nowhere to go," he said. Then he said, "Dear lady, I know you well enough to know you wouldn't turn him out for a trifle!" and without waiting for an answer, he raised his hand and gave her his blessing in a rumbling voice.

She smiled angrily and said, "I didn't create this situation, of course."

The priest let his eyes wander toward the birds. They had reached the middle of the lawn. The cock stopped suddenly and curving his neck backwards, he raised his tail and spread it with a shimmering timbrous noise. Tiers of small pregnant suns floated in a green-gold haze over his head. The priest stood transfixed, his jaw slack. Mrs, Mclntyre wondered where she had ever seen such an idiotic old man. "Christ will come like that!" he said in a loud gay voice and

wiped his hand over his mouth and stood there, gaping.

Mrs. Mclntyre's face assumed a set puritanical expression and she reddened. Christ in the conversation embarrassed her the way sex had her mother. "It is not my responsibility that Mr. Guizac has nowhere to go," she said. "I don't find myself responsible for all the extra people in the world."

The old man didn't seem to hear her. His attention was fixed on the cock who was taking minute steps backward, his head against the spread tail. "The Transfiguration," he murmured.

She had no idea what he was talking about. "Mr. Guizac didn't have to come here in the first place," she said, giving him a hard look.

The cock lowered his tail and began to pick grass. "He didn't have to come in the first place," she repeated, emphasizing each word. The old man smiled absently. "He came to redeem us," he said and blandly reached for her hand and shook it and said he must go.

If Mr. Shortley had not returned a few weeks later, she would have gone out looking for a new man to hire. She had not wanted him back but when she saw the familiar black automobile drive up the road and stop by the side of the house, she had the feeling dial she was the one returning, after a long miserable trip, to her own place. She realized all at once that it was Mrs. Shortley she had been missing. She had had no one to talk to since Mrs. Shortley left, and she ran to the door, expecting to see her heaving herself up the steps.

Mr. Shortley stood there alone. He had on a black felt hat and a **shirt** with red and blue palm trees designed in it but the hollows **in** his long bitten blistered face were deeper than they had been a month ago.

"Well!" she said. "Where is Mrs. Shortley?"

Mr. Shortley didn't say anything. The change in his face seemed to **have** come from the inside; he looked like a man who had gone for **a** long time without water. "She was God's own angel," he said in a **loud** voice. "She was the sweetest woman in the world."

"Where is she?" Mrs. Mclntyre murmured.

"Daid," he said. "She had herself a stroke on the day she left out of here." There was a corpse-like composure about his face. "I figure that Pole killed her," he said. "She seen through him from **the** first. She known he come from the devil. She told me so."

It took Mrs. Mclntyre three days to get over Mrs. Shortley's **death.** She told herself that anyone would have thought they were **kin.** She rehired Mr. Shortley

to do farm work though actually she **didn't** want him without his wife. She told him she was going to give thirty days' notice to the Displaced Person at the end of the month and that then he could have his job back in the dairy. Mr. **Shortley** preferred the dairy job but he was willing to wait. He said **it** would give him some satisfaction to see the Pole leave the place, **and** Mrs. Mclntyre said it would give her a great deal of satisfaction. **She** confessed that she should have been content with the help she **had** in the first place and not have been reaching into other parts of **the** world for it. Mr. Shortley said he never had cared for foreigners **since** he had been in the first world's war and seen what they were **like.** He said he had seen all kinds then but that none of them were **like** us. He said he recalled the face of one man who had thrown **a** hand-grenade at him and that the man had had little round **eyeglasses** exactly like Mr. Guizac's.

"But Mr. Guizac is a Pole, he's not a German," Mrs. Mclntyre **said.**

lit ain't a great deal of difference in them two kinds," Mr. **Shortley** had explained.

The Negroes were pleased to see Mr. Shortley back. The Displaced Person had expected them to work as hard as he worked himself, whereas Mr. Shortley recognized their limitations. He had never been a very good worker himself with Mrs. Shortley to keep him in line, but without her, he was even more forgetful and slow. The Pole worked as fiercely as ever and seemed to have no inkling that he was about to be fired. Mrs. Mclntyre saw jobs done in a short time that she had thought would never get done at all. Still she was resolved to get rid of him. The sight of his small stiff figure moving quickly here and there had come to be the most irritating sight on die place for her, and she felt she had been tricked by die old priest. He had said there was no legal obligation for her to keep die Displaced Person if he was not satisfactory, but then he had brought up the moral one.

She meant to tell him diat *her* moral obligation was to her own people, to Mr. Shortley, who had fought in the world war for his country and not to Mr. Guizac who had merely arrived here to take advantage of whatever he could. She felt she must have this out widi the priest before she fired the Displaced Person. When die first of die mondi came and the priest hadn't called, she put off giving **the** Pole notice for a little longer.

Mr. Shortley told himself that he should have known all along that no woman was going to do what she said she was when **she** said she was. He didn't know how long he could afford to put up with her shilly-shallying. He diought himself diat she was going soft and was afraid to turn the Pole out for fear he would have a

hard time getting another place. He could tell her die trudi about diis: diat if she let him go, in diree years he would own his own house and have a television aerial sitting on top of it. As a **matter** of policy, Mr. Shortley began to come to her back door every evening to put certain facts before her. "A white man sometimes don't get the consideration a nigger gets," he said, "but diat don't matter because he's still white, but sometimes," and here he would **pause** and look off into die distance, "a man diat's fought and **bled** and died in die service of his native land don't get the considera tion of one of diem like them he was fighting. I ast you: is diat right?" When he asked her such quesdons he could watch her **face** and tell he was making an impression. She didn't look too **well** these days. He noticed lines around her eyes diat hadn't been there when he and Mrs. Shortley had been the only white help on the place. Whenever he thought of Mrs. Shortley, he felt his heart go down like an old bucket into a dry well.

The old priest kept away as if he had been frightened by his last visit but finally, seeing that the Displaced Person had not been fired, he ventured to call again to take up giving Mrs. Mclntyre instructions where he remembered leaving them off. She had not asked to be instructed but he instructed anyway, forcing a little definition of one of the sacraments or of some dogma into each conversation he had, no matter with whom. He sat on her porch, taking no notice of her partly mocking, partly outraged expression as she sat shaking her foot, waiting for an opportunity to drive a wedge into his talk. "For," he was saying, as if he spoke of something that had happened yesterday in town, "when God sent his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord"—he slightly bowed his head —"as a Redeemer to mankind, He . . ."

"Father Flynn!" she said in a voice that made him jump. "I want to talk to you about something serious!"

The skin under the old man's right eye flinched.

"As far as I'm concerned," she said and glared at him fiercely, "Christ was just another D.P." He raised his hands slightly and let them drop on his knees. "Arrrrrr," he murmured as if he were considering this.

"I'm going to let that man go," she said. "I don't have any obligation to him. My obligation is to the people who've done something for their country, not to the ones who've just come over to take advantage of what they can get," and she began to talk rapidly, remembering all her arguments. The priest's attention seemed to retire to some private oratory to wait until she got through. Once or twice his gaze roved out onto the lawn as if he were hunting some means of

escape but she didn't stop. She told him how she had been hanging onto this place for thirty years, always just barely making it against people who came from nowhere and were going nowhere, who didn't want anything but an automobile. She said **the** had found out they were the same whether they came from Poland or Tennessee. When the Guizacs got ready, she said, they would not hesitate to leave her. She told him how the people **who** looked rich were the poorest of **all** because they had the most **to** keep up. She asked him how he thought she paid her feed **bills.** She told him she would like to have her house done over but **she** couldn't afford it. She couldn't even afford to have the monument restored over her husband's grave. She asked him if he would **like** to guess what her insurance amounted to for the year. Finally **she** asked him if he thought she was made of money and die old **man** suddenly let out a great ugly bellow as if this were a comical **question.**

When the visit was over, she felt let down, though she had **clearly** triumphed over him. She made up her mind now that on the first of the month, she would give die Displaced Person his thirty **days'** notice and she told Mr. Shortley so.

Mr. Shortley didn't say anything. His wife had been the **only** woman he was ever acquainted with who was never scared **off** from doing what she said. She said die Pole had been sent by **die** devil and die priest. Mr. Shortley had no doubt diat die priest **had** got some peculiar control over Mrs. Mclntyre and diat before **long** she would start attending his Masses. She looked as if somedung was wearing her down from the inside. She was diinner and **more** fidgety, and not as sharp as she used to be. She would look at a **milk** can now and not see how dirty it was and he had seen her **lips** move when she was not talking. The Pole never did anydiing **die** wrong way but all die same he was very irritating to her. Mr. Shortley himself did things as he pleased—not always her way—**but** she didn't seem to nodce. She had noticed though that die Pole **and** all his family were getdng fat; she pointed out to Mr. Shortley **diat** die hollows had come out of dieir cheeks and diat diey saved **every** cent diey made. "Yes'm, and one of diese days he'll be able to **buy** and sell you out," Mr. Shortley had ventured to say, and he could tell diat die statement had shaken her.

"I'm just waiting for the first," she had said.

Mr. Shordey waited too and die first came and went and she **didn't** fire him. He could have told anybody how it would be. He was **not** a violent man but he hated to see a woman done in by a foreigner. He felt diat diat was one thing a man couldn't stand by and **see** happen.

There was no reason Mrs. Mclntyre should not fire Mr. Guizac at **once** but she put it off from day to day. She was worried about her **bills** and about her health. She didn't sleep at night or when she did **the** dreamed about the Displaced

Person. She had never discharged **anyone** before; they had all left her. One night she dreamed that Mr. Guizac and his family were moving into her house and that she **was** moving in with Mr. Shortley. This was too much for her and **she** woke up and didn't sleep again for several nights; and one night **she** dreamed that the priest came to call and droned on and on saying, "Dear lady, I know your tender heart won't suffer you to turn **the** porrrrr man out. Think of the thousands of them, think of die **ovens** and the boxcars and the camps and the sick children and **Christ** Our Lord."

"He's extra and he's upset the balance around here," she said, **"and** I'm a logical practical woman and there are no ovens here and no camps and no Christ Our Lord and when he leaves, he'll make **more** money. He'll work at the mill and buy a car and don't talk to **me**—all they want is a car."

"The ovens and die boxcars and the sick children," droned die **priest,** "and our dear Lord."

"Just one too many," she said.

The next morning, she made up her mind while she was eating her **breakfast** that she would give him his notice at once, and she stood **up** and walked out of the kitchen and down the road with her table **napkin** still in her hand. Mr. Guizac was spraying die barn, standing in **his** swaybacked way with one hand on his hip. He turned off the **hose** and gave her an impatient kind of attention as if she were interfering with his work. She had not diought of what she would **say to** him, she had merely come. She stood in the barn door, looking severely at die wet spotless floor and the dripping stanchions. **"Yagoot?"** he said.

"Mr. Guizac," she said, "I can barely meet my obligations now." **Then** she said in a louder, stronger voice, emphasizing each word, **"I have** bills to pay."

"I too," Mr. Guizac said. "Much bills, little money," and he **shrugged. At the** other end of the barn, she saw a long beak-nosed shadow **glide like** a snake halfway up die sunlit open door and stop; and

somewhere behind her, she was aware of a silence where die sound of die Negroes shoveling had come a minute before. "This is my place," she said angrily. "All of you are extra. Each and every one of you are extra!"

"Ya," Mr. Guizac said and turned on die hose again. She wiped her moudi with die napkin she had in her hand and walked off, as if she had accomplished what she came for.

Mr. Shortley's shadow wididrew from die door and he leaned against die side of die barn and lit half of a cigarette diat he took out of his pocket. There was nodiing for him to do now but wait on die hand of God to strike, but he knew one thing: he was not going to wait widi his moudi shut.

Starting that morning, he began to complain and to state his side of die case to every person he saw, black or white. He complained in die grocery store and at the courdiouse and on die street corner and direcdy to Mrs. Mclntyre herself, for there was nodiing underhanded about him. If die Pole could have understood what he had to say, he would have said it to him too. "All men was created free and equal," he said to Mrs. Mclntyre, "and I risked my life and limb to prove it. Gone over diere and fought and bled and died and come back on over here and find out who's got my job—just exacdy who I been fighting. It was a hand-grenade come diat near to killing me and I seen who dirowed it—little man widi eye-glasses just like his. Might have bought diem at die same store. Small world," and he gave a bitter little laugh. Since he didn't have Mrs. Shordey to do die talking any more, he had started doing it himself and had found that he had a gift for it. He had die power of making odier people see his logic. He talked a good deal to the Negroes.

"Whyn't you go back to Africa?" he asked Sulk one morning as diey were cleaning out die silo. "That's your country, ain't it?"

"I ain't goin diere," the boy said. "They might eat me up."

"Well, if you behave yourself it isn't any reason you can't stay here," Mr. Shonley said kindly. "Because you didn't run away from nowhere. Your granddaddy was bought. He didn't have a diing to do with coming. It's the people diat run away from where diey come from diat I ain't got any use for."

"I never felt no need to travel," die Negro said.

> "Well," Mr. Shortley said, "if I was going to travel again, it would be to either China or Africa. You go to either of them two places and you can tell right away what the difference is between you and them. You go to these other places and the only way you can tell is if they say something. And then you can't always tell because about half of them know the English language. That's where we make our mistake," he said, "—letting all them people onto English. There'd be a heap less trouble if everybody only knew his own language. My wife said knowing two languages was like having eyes in the back of your head. You couldn't put nothing over on her."

"You sho couldn't," the boy muttered, and then he added, "She was fine. She was sho fine. I never known a finer white woman than her."

Mr. Shortley turned in the opposite direction and worked silently for a while. After a few minutes he leaned up and tapped th colored boy on the shoulder with the handle of his shovel. For a second he only looked at him while a great deal of meaning gathered in his wet eyes. Then he said softly, "Revenge is mine, saith the Lord."

Mrs. Mclntyre found that everybody in town knew Mr. Shortley's Version of

her business and that everyone was critical of her conduct. She began to understand that she had a moral obligation to fire the Pole and that she was shirking it because she found it hard to do. She could not stand the increasing guilt any longer and on a cold Saturday morning, she started off after breakfast to fire him. She walked down to the machine shed where she heard him cranking up die tractor.

There was a heavy frost on die ground that made the fields look like die rough backs of sheep; die sun was almost silver and die woods stuck up like dry brisdes on die sky line. The countryside seemed to be receding from die little circle of noise around die shed. Mr. Guizac was squatdng on the ground beside die small tractor, putting in a part. Mrs. Mclntyre hoped to get die fields turned over while he sdll had diirty days to work for her. The colored boy was standing by widi some tools in his hand and Mr. Shortley was under die shed about to get up on the large tractor and back it out. She meant to wait undl he and die Negro got out of die way before she began her unpleasant duty.

She stood watching Mr. Guizac, stamping her feet on die hard ground, for the cold was climbing like a paralysis up her feet and legs. She had on a heavy black coat and a red head-kerchief with her black hat pulled down on top of it to keep the glare out of her eyes. Under the black brim her face had an abstracted look and once or twice her lips moved silendy. Mr. Guizac shouted over die noise of die tractor for the Negro to hand him a screwdriver and when he got it, he turned over on his back on die icy ground and reached up under the machine. She could not see his face, only his feet and legs and trunk sticking impudently out from the side of the tractor. He had on rubber boots that were cracked and splashed with mud. He raised one knee and dien lowered it and turned himself slighdy. Of all die diings she resented about him, she resented most diat he hadn't left on his own accord.

Mr. Shortley had got on die large tractor and was backing it out from under the shed. He seemed to be warmed by it as if its heat and strength sent impulses up dirough him diat he obeyed instandy. He had headed it toward the small tractor but he braked it on a slight incline and jumped off and turned back toward the shed. Mrs. Mclntyre was looking fixedly at Mr. Guizac's legs lying flat on die ground now. She heard the brake on the large tractor slip and, looking up, she saw it move forward, calculating its own paw. Later she remembered that she had seen the Negro jump silendy out of the way as if a spring in die earth had released him and diat she had seen Mr. Shortley turn his head widi incredible slowness and stare silendy over his shoulder and diat she had started to shout to die Displaced Person but that she had not. She had felt her eyes and Mr. Shortley's eyes and the Negro's eyes come together in one look that froze them

in collusion forever, and she had heard die little noise die Pole made as die tractor wheel broke his backbone. The two men ran forward to help and she fainted.

She remembered, when she came to, running somewhere, perhaps into the house and out again but she could not remember what for or if she had fainted again when she got there. When she finally came back to where die tractors were, die ambulance had arrived. Mr. Guizac's body was covered widi die bent bodies of his wife and two children and by a black one which hung over him, murmuring words she didn't understand. At first she thought this must be the doctor but then widi a feeling of annoyance she recognized the priest, who had come with the ambulance and was slipping something into die crushed man's moudi. After a minute he stood up and she looked first at his bloody pants legs and then at his face which was not averted from her but was as withdrawn and expressionless as the rest of the countryside. She only stared at him for she was too shocked by her experience to be quite herself. Her mind was not taking hold of all that was happening. She felt she was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives, and she watched like a stranger while the dead man was carried away in die ambulance.

That evening, Mr. Shortley left without notice to look for a new position and the Negro, Sulk, was taken with a sudden desire to see more of the world and set off for the southern part of the state. The old man Astor could not work without company. Mrs. Mclntyre hardly noticed that she had no help left for she came down with a nervous affliction and had to go to the hospital. When she came back, she saw diat the place would be too much for her to run now and she turned her cows over to a professional auctioneer (who sold diem at a loss) and retired to live on what she had, while she tried to save her declining health. A numbness developed in one of her legs and her hands and head began to jiggle and eventually she had to stay in bed all the time with only a colored woman to wait on her. Her eyesight grew steadily worse and she lost her voice altogether. Not many people remembered to come out to the country to see her except die old priest. He came regularly once a week with a bag of breadcrumbs and, after he had fed these to the peacock, he would come in and sit by the side of her bed and explain the doctrines of the Church.

A Temple of the Holy Ghost

ALL weekend the two girls were calling each other Temple One and Temple Two, shaking *with* laughter and getting so red and hot that diey were positively ugly, particularly Joanne who had spots on her face anyway. They came in the brown convent uniforms they had to wear at Mount St. Scholastica but as soon as they opened their suitcases, they took off the uniforms and put on red skirts and loud blouses. They put on lipstick and their Sunday shoes and walked around in the high heels all over the house, always passing the long mirror in the hall slowly to get a look at their legs. None of dieir ways were lost on the child. If only one of them had come, that one would have played widi her, but since there were two of them, she was out of it and watched them suspiciously from a distance.

They were fourteen—two years older than she was—but neither of them was bright, which was why they had been sent to the convent. If they had gone to a regular school, they wouldn't have done anything but think about boys; at the convent the sisters, her mother said, would keep a grip on their necks. The child decided, after observing diem for a few hours, that diey were practically morons and she was glad to think diat diey were only second cousins and she couldn't have inherited any of their stupidity. Susan called herself Su-zan. She was very skinny but she had a pretty pointed face and red hair. Joanne had yellow hair that was naturally curly but she talked through her nose and when she laughed, she turned purple in patches. Neither one of them could say an intelligent thing and all their sentences began, "You know this boy I know well one time he . . ."

They were to stay all weekend and her mother said she didn't sec how she would entertain diem since she didn't know any boys their age. At this, the child, struck suddenly with genius, shouted, "There's Cheat I Get Cheat to come! Ask Miss Kirby to get Cheat to come show them around!" and she nearly choked on tlie food she had in her mouth. She doubled over laughing and hit the table with her fist and looked at the two bewildered girls while water started in her eyes and rolled down her fat cheeks and the braces she had in her mouth glared like tin. She had never diought of anydiing so funny before.

Her mother laughed in a guarded way and Miss Kirby blushed and carried her fork delicately to her mouth with one pea on it. She was a long-faced blonde schoolteacher who boarded with diem and Mr. Cheatam was her admirer, a rich old farmer who arrived every Saturday afternoon in a fifteen-year-old baby-blue

Pontiac powdered widi red clay dust and black inside witii Negroes diat he charged tea cents apiece to bring into town on Saturday afternoons. After he dumped diem he came to see Miss Kirby, always bringing a little gift—a bag of boiled peanuts or a watermelon or a stalk of sugar cane and once a wholesale box of Baby Ruth candy bars. He was bald-headed except for a little fringe of rust-colored hair and his face was nearly the same color as the unpaved roads and washed **Hke** diem *with* ruts and gulleys. He wore a pale green shirt widi a thin black stripe in it and blue galluses and his trousers cut across a protruding stomach that he pressed tenderly from time to time widi his big flat tliumb. All his teedi were backed with gold and he would roll his eyes at Miss Kirby in an impish way and say, "Haw **haw,"** sitting in dieir porch swing with his legs spread apart and his hightopped shoes pointing in opposite directions on *the* floor.

"I don't think Cheat is going to be in town diis weekend," Miss Kirby said, not in die least understanding that this was a joke, and **the** child was convulsed afresh, direw herself backward in her chair, fell out of it, rolled on die floor and lay diere heaving. Her modier **told** her if she didn't stop diis foolishness she would have to leave **the** table.

Yesterday her modier had arranged widi Alonzo Myers to drive them die forty-five miles to Mayville, where die convent was, to **get** die girls for die weekend and Sunday afternoon he was hired to drive them back again. He was an eighteen-year-old boy who weighed two hundred and fifty pounds and worked for the taxi company and he was all you could get to drive you anywhere. He smoked or rather chewed a short black cigar and he had a round sweaty chest that showed through the yellow nylon shirt he wore. When he drove all the windows of the car had to be open.

"Well there's Alonzo!" the child roared from the floor. "Get Alonzo to show em around) Get Alonzo!" The two girls, who had seen Alonzo, began to scream their indignation.

Her mother thought this was funny too but she said, "That'll be about enough out of you," and changed the subject. She asked them why they called each other Temple One and Temple Two and this sent them off into gales of giggles. Finally they managed to explain. Sister Perpetua, the oldest nun at the Sisters of Mercy

in Mayville, had given them a lecture on what to do if a young man should—here they laughed so hard they were not able to go on without going back to the beginning—on what to do if a young man should—they put their heads in their laps—on what to do if —they finally managed to shout it out—if he should "behave in an ungentlemanly manner with them in the back of an automobile." Sister Perpetua said they were to say, "Stop sir I I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost!" and that would put an end to it. The child **sat** up off the floor with a blank face. She didn't see anything so funny in this. What was really funny was the idea of Mr. Cheatam **or** Alonzo Myers beauing them around- That killed her.

Her mother didn't laugh at what they had said. "I think you girls are pretty silly," she said. "After all, that's what you are—**Temples** of the Holy Ghost."

The two of them looked up at her, politely concealing **their** giggles, but with astonished faces as if they were beginning **to** realize that she was made of the same stuff as Sister Perpetua.

Miss Kirby preserved her set expression and the child thought, it's all over her head anyhow. I am a Temple of the Holy **Ghost,** she said to herself, and was pleased with the phrase. It made **her** feel as if somebody had given her a present.

After dinner, her mother collapsed on the bed and said, **"Those girls** are going to drive me crazy if I don't get some entertainment for them. They're awful."

"I bet I know who you could get," the child started.

"Now listen. I don't want to hear any more about Mr. Cheatam," her mother said. "You embarrass Miss Kirby. He's her only friend. Oh my Lord," and she sat up and looked mournfully out the window, "tiiat poor soul is so lonesome she'll even ride in tliat car that smells like the last circle in hell."

And she's a Temple of the Holy Ghost too, the child reflected. "I wasn't dunking of him," she said. "I was thinking of tiiose two Wilkinses, Wendell and Cory, tliat visit old lady Buchell out on **her** farm. They're her grandsons. They work for her."

"Now that's an idea," her mother murmured and gave her an appreciative look. But then she slumped again. "They're only farm boys. These girls would turn up their noses at them."

"Huh," the child said. "They wear pants. They're sixteen and **they** got a car. Somebody said they were both going to be Church of God preachers because you don't have to know nothing to be
one."

"They would be perfectly safe with those boys all right," her **mother** said and in a minute she got up and called their grandmodier on the telephone and after she had talked to the old woman **a** half an hour, it was arranged that Wendell and Cory would come **to** supper and afterwards take the girls to the fair.

Susan and Joanne were so pleased that they washed their hair **and** rolled it up on aluminum curlers. Hah, diought the child, sitting cross-legged on the bed to watch them undo the curlers, wait'll you **get a** load of Wendell and Cory! "You'll like these boys," she said. **"Wendell** is six feet tall ands got red hair. Cory is six feet six **inches** tails got black hair and wears a sport jacket and they gottem **this** car with a squirrel tail on the front."

"How does a child like you know so much about these men?"

Susan asked and pushed her face up close to the mirror to watch **the** pupils in her eyes dilate.

The child lay back on the bed and began to count the narrow **boards** in the ceiling until she lost her place. I know them all **right,** she said to someone. We fought in the world war together. They were under me and I saved diem five times from Japanese suicide divers and Wendell said I am going to marry that kid and the other said oh no you ain't I am and I said neither one of you is because I will court marshall you all before you can bat an eye. "I've seen them around is all," she said.

When tiiey came the girls stared at them a second and then began to giggle and talk to each other about the convent. They sat in the swing together and Wendell and Cory sat on the banisters together. They sat like monkeys, tJieir knees on a level with their shoulders and tJieir arms hanging down between. They were short thin boys with red faces and high cheekbones and pale seed-like eyes. They had brought a harmonica and a guitar. One of them began to blow sofdy on the mouth organ, watching the girls over it, and the other started strumming the guitar and then began to sing, not watching them but keeping his head tilted upward as if he were only interested in hearing himself. He was singing a hillbilly song that sounded half like a love song and half like a hymn.

The child was standing on a barrel pushed into some bushes at the side of the house, her face on a level with the porch floor. The sun was going down and the sky was turning a bruised violet color that seemed to be connected with the sweet mournful sound of **die** music. Wendell began to smile as he sang and to look at the girls.

He looked at Susan with a dog-like loving look and sang,

"I've found a friend in Jesus,
He's everything to me,
He's the lily of the valley,
He's the One who's set me freel"

Then he turned the same look on Joanne and sang,

"A wall of fire about me, I've nothing now to fear, He's the lily of the valley, And I'll always have Him near!"

The girls looked at each other and held their lips stiff so as not to giggle but Susan let out one anyway and clapped her **hand** on her mouth. The singer frowned and for a few seconds **only** strummed the guitar. Then he began "The Old Rugged **Crow"** and diey listened politely but when he had finished diey said, "Let us sing one!" and before he could start anodier, diey began to sing with their convent-trained voices,

"Tantum ergo Sacramentum Veneremur Cernui: Et antiquum documentum Novo cedat ritui:"

The child watched die boys' solemn faces turn widi perplexed frowning stares at each other as if diey were uncertain whedier diey were being made fun of.

"Praestet fides supplementum Sensuum defectui. Genitori, Genitoque Laus et jubilatio

Salus, honor, virtus quoque . . ."

The boys' faces were dark red in the gray-purple light. They looked fierce and startled.

"Sit et benedictio; Procedenti ab utroque Compar sit laudatio. Amen."

The girls dragged out die Amen and then there was a silence. "That must be Jew singing," Wendell said and began to tune **the** guitar.

The girls giggled idiotically but the child stamped her foot on **the** barrel. "You big dumb ox!" she shouted. "You big dumb Church of God ox!" she roared and fell off die barrel and scrambled up **and** shot around die corner of die house as diey jumped from the banister to see who was shouting.

Her modier had arranged for diem to have supper in the back **yard** and she had a table laid out there under some Japanese **lanterns** diat she pulled out for garden parties. "I ain't eating widi **them,"** die child said and snatched her plate off die table and **carried** it to die kitchen and sat down with die diin blue-gummed **cook** and ate her supper.

"Howcome you be so ugly sometime?" the cook asked.

"Those stupid idiots," the child said.

The lanterns gilded the leaves of the trees orange on the level where they hung and above them was black-green and below them were different dim muted colors that made the girls sitting at the table look prettier than they were. From time to time, the child turned her head and glared out the kitchen window at the scene below.

"God could strike you deaf dumb and blind," die cook said, "and dien you wouldn't be as smart as you is."

"I would still be smarter tiian some," the child said.

After supper diey left for die fair. She wanted to go to die fair but not with them so even if they had asked her she wouldn't have gone. She went upstairs and paced the long bedroom with her hands locked togetiier behind her back and her head thrust forward and an expression, fierce and dreamy both, on her face. She didn't turn on the electric light but let die darkness collect and make die room smaller and more private. At regular intervals a light crossed the open window and threw shadows on the wall. She stopped and stood looking out over die dark slopes, past where die pond glinted silver, past the wall of woods to the speckled sky where a long finger of light was revolving up and around and away, searching the air as if it were hunting for die lost sun. It was the beacon light from the fair.

She could hear the distant sound of die calliope and she saw in her head all die tents raised up in a kind of gold sawdust light and the diamond ring of the ferris wheel going around and around up in the air and down again and the screeking merry-go-round going around and around on the ground. A fair lasted five or six days and diere was a special afternoon, for school children and a special night for niggers. She had gone last year on die afternoon for school children and had seen the monkeys and die fat man and had ridden on the ferris wheel. Certain tents were closed dien because diey contained diings diat would be known only to grown people but she had looked with interest at the advertising on the closed tents, at die faded-looking pictures on the canvas of people in tights, widi stiff stretched composed faces like the faces of die martyrs waiting to have their tongues cut out by the Roman soldier. She had imagined that what was inside these tents concerned medicine and she had made up her mind to be a doctor when she grew up.

She had since changed and decided to be an engineer but as **she** looked out the window and followed the revolving searchlight as it widened and shortened and wheeled in its arc, she felt that she would have to be much more than just a

doctor or an engineer. She would have to be a saint because that was die occupation that included everything you could know; and yet she knew she would never be a saint. She did not steal or murder but she was a born liar and slothful and she sassed her mother and was deliberately ugly to almost everybody. She was eaten up also with the sin of Pride, the worst one. She made fun of the Baptist preacher who came to the school at commencement to give the devotional. She would pull down her mouth and hold her forehead as if she were in agony and groan, "Fawther, we thank Thee," exactly the way he did and she had been told many times not to do it. She could never be a saint, but she thought she could be a martyr if they lulled her quick.

She could stand to be shot but not to be burned in oil. She didn't know if she could stand to be torn to pieces by lions or not. She began to prepare her martyrdom, seeing herself in a pair of tights in a great arena, lit by the early Christians hanging in cages of fire, making a gold dusty light that fell on her and the lions. The first lion charged forward and fell at her feet, converted. A whole series of lions did the same. The lions liked her so much she even slept with them and finally the Romans were obliged to burn her but to their astonishment she would not burn down and finding she **was** so hard to kill, they finally cut off her head very quickly with a sword and she went immediately to heaven. She rehearsed this **several** times, returning each time at the entrance of Paradise to the lions.

Finally she got up from the window and got ready for bed and got in without saying her prayers. There were two heavy double **beds** in the room. The girls were occupying the other one and she **tried** to think of something cold and clammy that she could hide in their bed but her thought was fruitless. She didn't have anything she could think of, like a chicken carcass or a piece of beef liver. The sound of the calliope coming through the window kept her awake and she remembered that she hadn't said her prayers and got up and knelt down and began them. She took a running start and went through to the other side of the Apostle's Creed and then hung by her chin on the side of the bed, empty-minded. Her prayers, when she remembered to say them, were usually perfunctory but sometimes when she had done something wrong or heard music or lost somediing, or sometimes for no reason at all, she would be moved to fervor and would think of Christ on the long journey to Calvary, crushed three times on the rough cross. Her mind would stay on this a while and then get empty and when something roused her, she would find that she was thinking of a different thing entirely, of some dog or some girl or something she was going to do some day. Tonight, remembering Wendell and Cory, she was filled with thanksgiving and almost weeping with

delight, she said, "Lord, Lord, thank You that I'm not in die Church of God, thank You Lord, thank You!" and got back in bed and kept repeating it until she went to sleep.

The girls came in at a quarter to twelve and waked her up widb their giggling. They turned on the small blue-shaded lamp to see to get undressed by and their skinny shadows climbed up the wall and broke and continued moving about softly on the ceiling. The child sat up to hear what all they had seen at the fair. Susan had **a** plastic pistol full of cheap candy and Joanne a pasteboard cat *with* red polka dots on it. "Did you see die monkeys dance?" die child asked. "Did you see diat fat man and diose midgets?"

"All kinds of freaks," Joanne said. And then she said to Susan, "I enjoyed it all but the you-know-what," and her face assumed **a** peculiar expression as if she had bit into something that she didn't know if she liked or not.

The other stood still and shook her head once and nodded slighdy at the child. "Little pitchers," she said in a low voice but die child heard it and her heart began to beat very fast.

She got out of her bed and climbed onto the footboard of **dieirs.** They turned off the light and got in but she didn't move. She **sat** there, looking hard at them until their faces were well denned in die dark. "I'm not as old as you all," she said, "but I'm about a million times smarter."

"There are some things," Susan said, "that a child of your age

doesn't know," and they both began to giggle. "Go back to your own bed," Joanne said. The child didn't move. "One time," she said, her voice hollow-sounding in the dark, "I saw this rabbit have rabbits."

There was a silence. Then Susan said, "How?" in an indifferent **tone** and she knew diat she had diem. She said she wouldn't tell until they told about the you-know-what. Actually she had never **seen** a rabbit have rabbits but she forgot this as they began to tell what diey had seen in the tent.

It had been a freak with a particular name but diey couldn't remember the name. The tent where it was had been divided into **two** parts by a black curtain, one side for men and one for women. **The** freak went from one side to die other, talking first to die men **and** dien to die women, but everyone could hear. The stage ran **all** die way across die front. The girls heard the freak say to the **men,** "I'm going to show you this and if you laugh, God may **strike** you die same way." The freak had a country voice, slow and **natal** and neidier high nor low, just flat. "God made me thisaway **and** if you laugh He may strike you die same way. This is die **way** He wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way. I'm **thowing** you because I got to make die best of it. I expect you to **act like** ladies

and gentlemen. I never done it to myself nor had a **dung** to do widi it but I'm making the best of it. I don't dispute **hit."** Then diere was a long silence on the odier side of the tent and **finally** die freak left die men and came over onto the women's side **and said** die same thing.

The child felt every muscle strained as if she were hearing die **answer** to a riddle diat was more puzzling than the riddle itself. **To u mean** it had two heads?" she said.

"No," Susan said, "it was a man and woman bodi. It pulled up **its dress** and showed us. It had on a blue dress." **The child** wanted to ask how it could be a man and woman both **without** two heads but she did not. She wanted to get back into her

own bed and think it out and she began to climb down off **the** footboard.

"What about the rabbit?" Joanne asked.

The child stopped and only her face appeared over the footboard, abstracted, absent. "It spit them out of its mouth," she said, "six of them."

She lay in bed trying to picture the tent with the freak **walking** from side to side but she was too sleepy to figure it out. She **wai** better able to see the faces of the country people watching, **the** men more solemn than they were in church, and the women **stern** and polite, with painted-looking eyes, standing as if they **were** waiting for the first note of the piano to begin the hymn. She **could** hear the freak saying, "God made me thisaway and I don't **dispute** hit," and the people saying, "Amen. Amen."

"God done this to me and I praise Him."

"Amen. Amen."

"He could strike you thisaway."

"Amen. Amen."

"But he has not."

"Amen."

"Raise yourself up. A temple of the Holy Ghost. You! You **are** God's temple, don't you know? Don't you know? God's Spirit **hat** a dwelling in you, don't you know?"

"Amen. Amen."

"If anybody desecrates the temple of God, God will bring him **to** ruin and if you laugh, He may strike you thisaway. A temple of God is a holy thing. Amen. Amen."

"I am a temple of the Holy Ghost."

"Amen."

The people began to slap their hands without making a **loud** noise and with a regular beat between the Amens, more and **more** softly, as if they knew there was a child near, half asleep.

The next afternoon the girls put on their brown convent uniforms again and the child and her mother took them back to **Mount** St. Scholastica. "Oh glory, oh Pete!" they said. "Back to **the tak** mines." Alonzo Myers drove them and **the** child sat in front **with him** and her mother sat in back between the two girls, telling them **tuch** things as how pleased she was to have had them and how they must come back again and then about the good times she and **their** mothers had had when they were girls at the convent. The child didn't listen to any of this twaddle but kept as close to the **locked** door as she could get and held her head out die window. **They** had thought Alonzo would smell better on Sunday but he **did** not. With her hair blowing over her face she could look directly **into the** ivory sun which was framed in the middle of the blue afternoon but when she pulled it away from her eyes she had to **iquint.**

Mount St. Scholastica was a red brick house set back in a garden in the center of town. There was a filling station on one side of it **and a** firehouse on the other. It had a high black grillework fence **around** it and narrow bricked walks between old trees and japonica **bushes** that were heavy with blooms. A big moon-faced nun came **bustling** to die door to let them in and embraced her mother and would have done the same to her but that she stuck out her hand **and** preserved a frigid frown, looking just past the sister's shoes at **the** wainscoting. They had a tendency to kiss even homely children, **but the** nun shook her hand vigorously and even cracked her knuckles a little and said they must come to the chapel, that benediction was just beginning. You put your foot in their door and they **got** you praying, the child thought as they hurried down the polished **corridor.**

You'd think she had to catch a train, she continued in the same **ugly** vein as they entered the chapel where die sisters were kneeling on one side and the girls, all in brown uniforms, on the other. The **chapel** smelied of incense. It was light green and gold, a series of **springing** arches diat ended with the one over the altar where the **priest** was kneeling in front of the monstrance, bowed low. A small **boy** in a surplice was standing behind him, swinging the censer. The **child** knelt down between her mother and die nun and they were **well** into die *"Tantum Ergo"* before her ugly dioughts stopped and **she** began to realize that she was in the presence of God. Hep me **not** to be so mean, she began mechanically. Hep

me not to give **her** so much sass. Hep me not to talk like I do. Her mind began to get quiet and then empty but when the priest raised the monstrance with the Host shining ivory-colored in the center of it, she was thinking of the tent at the fair that had the freak in it. The freak was saying, "I don't dispute hit. This is the way He wanted me to be."

As they were leaving the convent door, the big nun swooped down on her mischievously and nearly smodiered her in the black habit, mashing the side of her face into the crucifix hitched onto her belt and dien holding her off and looking at her widi little periwinkle eyes.

On the way home she and her mother sat in the back and Alonzo drove by himself in the front. The child observed diree folds of fat in die back of his neck and noted that his ears were pointed almost like a pig's. Her mother, making conversation, asked him if he had gone to the fair.

"Gone," he said, "and never missed a thing and it was good I gone when I did because they ain't going to have it next week like they said they was."

"Why?" asked her mother.

"They shut it on down," he said. "Some of tiie preachers from town gone out and inspected it and got the police to shut it on down."

Her mother let the conversation drop and die child's round face was lost in thought. She turned it toward the window and looked out over a stretch of pasture land that rose and fell with a gathering greenness until it touched the dark woods. The sun was a huge red ball like an elevated Host drenched in blood and when it sank out of sight, it left a line in the sky like a red clay road hanging over the trees.

The Artificial Nigger

MR. HEAD awakened to discover that the room was full of moonlight. He sat up and stared at the floor boards—the color of silver—and then at the ticking on his pillow, which might have been brocade, and after a second, he saw half of die moon **five** feet away in his shaving mirror, paused as if it were waiting for **his** permission to enter. It rolled forward and cast a dignifying light oa everydiing. The straight chair against die wall looked stiff and attentive as if it were awaiting an order and Mr. Head's trousers, **hanging** to the back of it, had an almost noble air, like the garment **some** great man had just flung to his servant; but the face on the moon was a grave one. It gazed across the room and out die window where it floated over die horse stall and appeared to contemplate itself widi the look of a young man who sees his old age before him. Mr. Head could have said to it that age was a choice blessing **and** tliat only with years does a man enter into that calm understanding of life that makes him a suitable guide for the young. **This,** at least, had been his own experience. He sat up and grasped die iron posts at die foot of his bed and **raised** himself until he could see the face on die alarm clock which **sat** on an overturned bucket beside the chair. The hour was two in die morning. The alarm on die clock did not work but he was **not** dependent on any mechanical means to awaken him. Sixty **years** had not dulled his responses; his physical reactions, like his moral ones, were guided by his will and strong character, and diese **could** be seen plainly in his features. He had a long tube-like face **widi** a long rounded open jaw and a long depressed nose. His eyes **were** alert but quiet, and in the miraculous moonlight they had a look of composure and of ancient wisdom as if they belonged to one of the great guides of men. He might have been Vergil summoned in the middle of the night to go to Dante, or better, Raphael, awakened by a blast of God's light to fly to the side of Tobias. The only dark spot in the room was Nelson's pallet, underneath the shadow of the window.

Nelson was hunched over on his side, his knees under his chin and his heels under his bottom. His new suit and hat were in **the** boxes that they had been sent in and these were on **the** floor at **the** foot of the pallet where he could get his hands on them as soon as he woke up. The slop jar, out of the shadow and made snow-white in the moonlight, appeared to stand guard over him like a **small** personal angel. Mr. Head lay back down, feeling entirely confident that he could carry out the moral mission of the coming day. He meant to be up before Nelson and to have the breakfast cooking by the time he awakened. The boy was always

irked when Mr. Head was the first up. They would have to leave the house at **four** to get to the railroad junction by five-thirty. The train was to **stop** for them at five forty-five and they had to be there on time **for** this train was stopping merely to accommodate them.

This would be the boy's first trip to the city though he claimed it would be his second because he had been born there. Mr. **Head** had tried to point out to him that when he was born he didn't **have** the intelligence to determine his whereabouts but this had **made** no impression on the child at all and he continued to insist **that** this was to be his second trip. It would be Mr. Head's third trip.

Nelson had said, "I will've already been there twict and I ain't **but** ten."

Mr. Head had contradicted him.

"If you ain't been there in fifteen years, how you know you'll be able to find your way about?" Nelson had asked. "How you **know** it hasn't changed some?"

"Have you ever," Mr. Head had asked, "seen me lost?"

Nelson certainly had not but he was a child who was **never** satisfied until he had given an impudent answer and he **replied,** "It's nowhere around here to get lost at."

"The day is going to come," Mr. Head prophesied, "when **you'll** find you ain't as smart as you think you are." He had been thinking about this trip for several months but it was for the most part in moral terms that he conceived it. It was to be a lesson that the boy would never forget. He was to find out from it that he had no cause for pride merely because he had been born in a city. He was to find put that the city is not a great place. Mr. Head meant him to see everything there is to see in a city so that he would be content to stay at home for the rest of his life. He fell asleep thinking how the boy would at last find out that he was not as smart as he thought **he** was.

He was awakened at three-thirty by the smell of fatback frying **and** he leaped off his cot. The pallet was empty and the clothes boxes had been thrown open. He put on his trousers and ran into the other room. The boy had a corn pone on

cooking and had fried **the** meat. He was sitting in the half-dark at the table, drinking cold coffee out of a can. He had on his new suit and his new gray hat pulled low over his eyes. It was too big for him but they had ordered it a size large because they expected his head to grow. He **didn't** say anything but his entire figure suggested satisfaction at having arisen before Mr. Head.

Mr. Head went to the stove and brought the meat to the table **in** the skillet. "It's no hurry," he said. "You'll get there soon enough **and** it's no guarantee you'll like it when you do neither," and he **sat** down across from the boy whose hat teetered back slowly to **reveal** a fiercely expressionless face, very much the same shape as **the old** man's. They were grandfather and grandson but they looked **enough** alike to be brothers and brothers not too far apart in age, **for** Mr. Head had a youthful expression by daylight, while the boy's **look** was ancient, as if he knew everything already and would be **pleased** to forget it.

Mr. Head had once had a wife and daughter and when the wife **died,** the daughter ran away and returned after an interval with **Nelson.** Then one morning, without getting out of bed, she died **and** left Mr. Head with sole care of the year-old child. He had **made** the mistake of telling Nelson that he had been born in **Atlanta.** If he hadn't told him that, Nelson couldn't have insisted **that** this was going to be his second trip.

"You may not like it a bit," Mr. Head continued. "It'll be full of niggers."

The boy made a face as if he could handle a nigger.

"All right," Mr. Head said. "You ain't ever seen a nigger."

"You wasn't up very early," Nelson said.

"You ain't ever seen a nigger," Mr. Head repeated. "There hasn't been a nigger in this county since we run that one out twelve **yean** ago and that was before you were born." He looked at the boy **ai** if he were daring him to say he had ever seen a Negro.

"How you know I never saw a nigger when I lived there before?" Nelson asked. "I probably saw a lot of niggers."

"If you seen one you didn't know what he was," Mr. Head **said,** completely exasperated. "A six-month-old child don't know a **nigger** from anybody else."

"I reckon I'll know a nigger if I see one," the boy said and **got** up and straightened his slick sharply creased gray hat and **went** outside to the privy.

They reached the junction some time before the train was due to arrive and stood about two feet from die first set of tracks. Mr. Head carried a paper sack with some biscuits and a can of **sardina** in it for their lunch. A coarse-looking orange-colored sun **coming** up behind the east range of mountains was making the sky a **dull** red behind them, but in front of them it was still gray and **they**

faced a gray transparent moon, hardly stronger than a thumbprint and completely without light. A small tin switch box and a **black** fuel tank were all there was to mark the place as a junction; **the** tracks were double and did not converge again until they **were** hidden behind the bends at either end of the clearing. **Traini** passing appeared to emerge from a tunnel of trees and, hit **for** • second by the cold sky, vanish terrified into the woods again; Mr. Head had had to make special arrangements with the ticket **agent** to have this train stop and he was secretly afraid it would **not, in** which case, he knew Nelson would say, "I never thought no **train** was going to stop for you." Under the useless morning moon **the** tracks looked white and fragile. Both the old man and the **child** stared ahead as if they were awaiting an apparition.

Then suddenly, before Mr. Head could make up his **mind** to turn back, there was a deep warning bleat and the train appeared, gliding very slowly, almost silently around the bend of trees about **two** hundred yards down the track, with one yellow front light shining. Mr. Head was still not certain it would stop and he felt it would make an even bigger idiot of him if it went by slowly. Both he and Nelson, however, were prepared to ignore the train if it passed them.

The engine charged by, filling tlieir noses with the smell of hot metal and then the second coach came to a stop exactly where they were standing. A conductor with the face of an ancient bloated bulldog was on the step as if he expected them, though he did not look as if it mattered one way or the other to him if they got on or not. "To the right," he said.

Their entry took only a fraction of a second and the train was already speeding on as they entered the quiet car. Most of the travelers were still sleeping, some with tlieir heads hanging off the chair arms, some stretched across two seats, and some sprawled out with their feet in the aisle. Mr. Head saw two unoccupied seats and pushed Nelson toward them. "Get in there by the winder," he said in his normal voice which was very loud at this hour of the morning. "Nobody cares if you sit there because it's nobody in it. Sit right there."

"I heard you," die boy muttered. "It's no use in you yelling," and he sat down and turned his head to the glass. There he saw a pale ghost-like face scowling at him beneath the brim of a pale ghost-like **hat.** His grandfather, looking quickly too, saw a different ghost, **pale** but grinning, under a black hat.

Mr. Head sat down and settled himself and took out his ticket
and started reading aloud everything that was printed on it. People
began to stir. Several woke up and stared at him. "Take off your
hat," he said to Nelson and took off his own and put it on his
knee. He had a small amount of white hair diat had turned tobacco-colored over the years and this lay flat across die back of his head.

The front of his head was bald and creased. Nelson took off his **hat** and put it on his knee and diey waited for die conductor to come **ask** for their tickets.

The man across die aisle from diem was spread out over two seats, his feet propped on the window and his head jutting into the aisle. He had on a light blue suit and a yellow shirt unbuttoned at the neck. His eyes had just opened and Mr. Head was ready to introduce himself when the conductor came up from behind and growled, "Tickets."

When the conductor had gone, Mr. Head gave Nelson the return half of his ticket and said, "Now put that in your pocket and don't lose it or you'll have to stay in the city."

"Maybe I will," Nelson said as if this were a reasonable suggestion.

Mr. Head ignored him. "First time this boy has ever been on a train," he explained to the man across the aisle, who was sitting up now on the edge of his seat with both feet on the floor.

Nelson jerked his hat on again and turned angrily to the window.

"He's never seen anything before," Mr. Head continued. "Ignorant as the day he was born, but I mean for him to get his fill once and for all."

The boy leaned forward, across his grandfather and toward the stranger. "I was born in the city," he said. "I was born there. This is my second trip." He said it in a high positive voice but the man across the aisle didn't look as if he understood. There were heavy purple circles under his eyes.

Mr. Head reached across the aisle and tapped him on the arm. "The thing to do with a boy," he said sagely, "is to show him all it is to show. Don't hold nothing back."

"Yeah," the man said. He gazed down at his swollen feet and lifted the left one about ten inches, from the floor. After a minute he put it down and lifted the other. All through the car people began to get up and move about and yawn and stretch. Separate voices could be heard here and there and then a general hum. Suddenly Mr. Head's serene expression changed. His mouth almost closed and a light, fierce and cautious both, came into his eyes. He was looking down the length of the car. Without turning, he caught Nelson by the arm and pulled him forward. "Look," he said.

A huge coffee-colored man was coming slowly forward. He had on a light suit and a yellow satin tie with a ruby pin in it. One of his hands rested on his stomach which rode majestically under hit buttoned coat, and in the other he held the head of a black walking **stick** that he picked up and set down with a deliberate outward **motion** each time he took a step. He was proceeding very slowly, **his large** brown eyes gazing over the heads of the passengers. He **had a**

small white mustache and white crinkly hair. Behind him **there** were two young women, both coffee-colored, one in a yellow **dress** and one in a green. Their progress was kept at the rate of **his** and they chatted in low throaty voices as they followed him.

Mr. Head's grip was tightening insistently on Nelson's arm. As **die** procession passed them, the light from a sapphire ring on the **brown** hand that picked up the cane reflected in Mr. Head's eye, **but** he did not look up nor did the tremendous man look at him. **The** group proceeded up the rest of the aisle and out of the car. Mr. Head's grip on Nelson's arm loosened. "What was that?" he **asked.**

"A man," the boy said and gave him an indignant look as if he **were** tired of having his intelligence insulted. "What kind of a man?" Mr. Head persisted, his voice expressionless. "A fat man," Nelson said. He was beginning to feel that he had **better** be cautious.

"You don't know what kind?" Mr. Head said in a final tone.

"An old man," the boy said and had a sudden foreboding that he **was** not going to enjoy the day. Tha t was a nigger," Mr. Head said and sat back. Nelson jumped up on the seat and stood looking backward to

the end of the car but the Negro had gone.

"I'd of thought you'd know a nigger since you seen so many when **you** was in the city on your first visit," Mr. Head continued. "That's **his** first nigger," he said to the man across the aisle.

The boy slid down into the seat. "You said they were black," he **said** in an angry voice. "You never said they were tan. How do you **expect** me to know anything when you don't tell me right?"

"You're just ignorant is all," Mr. Head said and he got up and **moved** over in the vacant seat by the man across the aisle.

Nelson turned backward again and looked where the Negro had **disappeared.** He felt that the Negro had deliberately walked down **die** aisle in order to make a fool of him and he hated him with a fierce raw fresh hate; and also, he understood now why his grandfadier disliked diem. He looked toward die window and die face diere seemed to suggest diat he might be inadequate to die day's exactions. He wondered if he would even recognize die city when diey came to it.

After he had told several stories, Mr. Head realized diat die man he was talking to was asleep and he got up and suggested to Nelson diat diey walk over the train and see die parts of it. He particularly wanted die boy to see die toilet so diey went first to die men's room and examined die plumbing. Mr. Head demonstrated die ice-water cooler as if he had invented it and showed Nelson die

bowl widi die single spigot where the travelers brushed dieir teedi. They went dirough several cars and came to die diner.

This was die most elegant car in the train. It was painted a rich egg-yellow and had a wine-colored carpet on die floor. There were wide windows over die tables and great spaces of die rolling view were caught in miniature in die sides of die coffee pots and in die glasses. Three very black Negroes in white suits and aprons were running up and down die aisle, swinging trays and bowing and bending over die travelers eating breakfast. One of them rushed up to Mr. Head and Nelson and said, holding up two fingers, "Space for two!" but Mr. Head replied in a loud voice, "We eaten before we left!"

The waiter wore large brown spectacles diat increased die size of his eye whites. "Stan' aside dien please," he said widi an airy wave of the arm as if he were brushing aside flies.

Neither Nelson nor Mr. Head moved a fraction of an inch,

"Look," Mr. Head said.

The near corner of die diner, containing two tables, was set off from die rest by a saffron-colored curtain. One table was set but empty but at die odier, facing diem, his back to die drape, sat die tremendous Negro. He was speaking in a soft voice to die two women while he buttered a muffin. He had a heavy sad face and his neck bulged over his white collar on either side. "They rope diem off," Mr. Head explained. Then he said, "Let's go see *the* kitchen," and diey walked die length of die diner but die black waiter was coming fast behind diem.

"Passengers are not allowed in the kitchen!" he said in a haughty voice. "Passengers are NO T allowed in the kitchen I"

Mr. Head stopped where he was and turned. "And there's good reason for that," he shouted into die Negro's chest, "because the cockroaches would run die passengers out!"

All die travelers laughed and Mr. Head and Nelson walked out, grinning. Mr. Head was known at home for his quick wit and Nelson felt a sudden keen pride in him. He realized the old man would be his only support in the strange place diey were approaching. He would be entirely alone in the world if he were ever lost from his grandfather. A terrible excitement shook him and he wanted to take hold of Mr. Head's coat and hold on like a child.

As they went back to their seats they could see through the passing windows that the countryside was becoming speckled with small houses and shacks and diat a highway ran alongside die train. Cars sped by on it, very small and fast. Nelson felt that there was less breath in the air than diere had been thirty minutes

ago. The man across die aisle had left and die re was no one near for Mr. Head to hold a conversation with so he looked out the window, through his own reflection, and read aloud die names of die buildings diey were passing. "The Dixie Chemical Corp!" he announced. "Southern Maid Flour! Dixie Doors! Southern Belle Cotton Products! Patty's Peanut Butter! Soudiern Mammy Cane Syrup!"

"Hush up!" Nelson hissed.

All over the car people were beginning to get up and take their luggage off the overhead racks. Women were putting on their coats and hats. The conductor stuck his head in the car and snarled, "Firstoppppmry," and Nelson lunged out of his sitting position, trembling. Mr. Head pushed him down by die shoulder.

"Keep your seat," he said in dignified tones. "The first stop is on the edge of town. The second stop is at the main railroad station." He had come by diis knowledge on his first trip when he had got off at the first stop and had had to pay a man fifteen cents to take him into die heart of town. Nelson sat back down, very pale. For the first time in his life, he understood diat his grandfadier was indispensable to him.

The train stopped and let off a few passengers and glided on as if it had never ceased moving. Outside, behind rows of brown rickety houses, a line of blue buildings stood up, and beyond them a pale rose-gray sky faded away to nothing. The train moved into the railroad yard. Looking down, Nelson saw lines and lines of silver tracks multiplying and criss-crossing. Then before he could start counting them, the face in the window started out at him, gray but distinct, and he looked die other way. The train was in the station. Both he and Mr. Head jumped up and ran to the door. Neither noticed that they had left die paper sack with the lunch in it on the seat.

They walked stiffly through the small station and came out of a heavy door into the squall of traffic. Crowds were hurrying to work. Nelson didn't know where to look. Mr. Head leaned against the side of the building and glared in front of him.

Finally Nelson said, "Well, how do you see what all it is to sec?"

Mr. Head didn't answer. Then as if the sight of people passing had given him the clue, he said, "You walk," and started off down die street. Nelson followed, steadying his hat. So many sights and sounds were flooding in on him that for the first block he hardly knew what he was seeing. At the second corner, Mr. Head turned and looked behind him at the station they had left, a putty-colored terminal with a concrete dome on top. He thought that if he could keep the dome always in sight, he would be able to get back **in** the afternoon to catch the train again.

As they walked along, Nelson began to distinguish details and take note of the store windows, jammed with every kind of equipment—hardware, drygoods, chicken feed, liquor. They passed **one** that Mr. Head called his particular attention to where you walked in and sat on a chair with your feet upon two rests and let a **Negro** polish your shoes. They walked slowly and stopped and stood at **die** entrances so he could see what went on in each place but they **did** not go into any of them. Mr. Head was determined not to go **into** any city store because on his first trip here, he had got lost in **a** large one and had found his way out only after many people **bad** insulted him.

They came in die middle of the next block to a store that had **a**

weighing machine in front of it and they both in turn stepped up on it and put in a penny and received a ticket. Mr. Head's ticket said, "You weigh 120 pounds. You are upright and brave and all your friends admire you." He put the ticket in his pocket, surprised that die machine should have got his character correct but his weight wrong, for he had weighed on a grain scale not long before and knew he weighed no. Nelson's ticket said, "You weigh 98 pounds. You have a great destiny ahead of you but beware of dark women." Nelson did not know any women and he weighed only 68 pounds but Mr. Head pointed out that the machine had probably printed tlie number upside down, meaning the 9 for a 6.

They walked on and at the end of five blocks the dome of the terminal sank out of sight and Mr. Head turned to the left. Nelson could have stood in front of every store window for an hour if diere had not been another more interesting one next to it. Suddenly he said, "I was born here I" Mr. Head turned and looked at him with horror. There was a sweaty brightness about his face. "This is where I come from!" he said.

Mr. Head was appalled. He saw the moment had come for drastic action. "Lemme show you one thing you ain't seen yet," he said and took him to the corner where there was a sewer entrance. "Squat down," he said, "and stick you head in there," and he held the back of the boy's coat while he got down and put his head in the sewer. He drew it back quickly, hearing a gurgling in the depths under the sidewalk. Then Mr. Head explained the sewer system, how the entire city was underlined with it, how it contained all the drainage and was full of rats and how a man could slide into it and be sucked along down endless pitchblack tunnels. At any minute any man in the city might be sucked into the sewer and never heard from again. He described it so well that Nelson was for some seconds shaken. He connected the sewer passages with the entrance to hell and understood for the first time how the world was put together in its lower parts. He drew away from the curb.

Then he said, "Yes, but you can stay away from the holes," and his face took

on that stubborn look that was so exasperating to his grandfather. "This is where I come from!" he said.

Mr. Head was dismayed but he only muttered, "You'll get your fill," and they walked on. At the end of two more blocks he turned to the left, feeling that he was circling the dome; and he was correct for in a half-hour they passed in front of the railroad station again. At first Nelson did not notice that he was seeing the same stores twice but when they passed die one where you put your feet on the rests while the Negro polished your shoes, he perceived that they were walking in a circle.

"We done been here!" he shouted. "I don't believe you know where you're atl"

"The direction just slipped my mind for a minute," Mr. Head said and they turned down a different street. He still did not intend to let the dome get too far away and after two blocks in their new direction, he turned to the left. This street contained two- and three-story wooden dwellings. Anyone passing on the sidewalk could see into the rooms and Mr. Head, glancing through one window, saw a woman lying on an iron bed, looking out, with a sheet pulled over her. Her knowing expression shook him. A fierce-looking boy on a bicycle came driving down out of nowhere and he had to jump to the side to keep from being hit. "It's nothing to them if they knock you down," he said. "You better keep closer to me."

They walked on for some time on streets like this before he remembered to turn again. The houses they were passing now were all unpainted and the wood in them looked rotten; the street between was narrower. Nelson saw a colored man. Then another. Then another. "Niggers live in these houses," he observed.

"Well come on and we'll go somewheres else," Mr. Head said.

"We didn't come to look at niggers," and they turned down an other street but they continued to see Negroes everywhere. Nelson'i skin began to prickle and they stepped along at a faster pace in order to leave the neighborhood as soon as possible. There were colored men in their undershirts standing in the doors and colored women rocking on the sagging porches. Colored children played in the gutters and stopped what they were doing to look at them. Before long they began to pass rows of stores with colored cus tomers in them but they didn't pause at the entrances of these. Black eyes in black faces were watching them from every direction. "Yes," Mr. Head said, "this is where you were born—right **here** with all these niggers."

Nelson scowled. "I think you done got us lost," he said.

Mr. Head swung around sharply and looked for the dome. It was nowhere in

sight. "I ain't got us lost either," he said. "You're just tired of walking."

"I ain't tired, I'm hungry," Nelson said. "Give me a biscuit."

They discovered then that they had lost the lunch.

"You were the one holding the sack," Nelson said. "I would have kepaholt of it."

"If you want to direct this trip, I'll go on by myself and leave **you** right here," Mr. Head said and was pleased to see the boy turn white. However, he realized they were lost and drifting farther every minute from the station. He was hungry himself and beginning to be thirsty and since they had been in the colored neighborhood, they had both begun to sweat. Nelson had on his shoes and he was unaccustomed to them. The concrete sidewalks were very **hard.** They both wanted to find a place to sit down but this was impossible and they kept on walking, the boy muttering under his **breath,** "First you lost the sack and then you lost the way," and Mr. Head growling from time to time, "Anybody wants to be **from** this nigger heaven can be from it I"

By now the sun was well forward in the sky. The odor of dinners **cooking** drifted out to them. The Negroes were all at their doors **to see** them pass. "Whyn't you ast one of these niggers the way?" **Nelson** said. "You got us lost."

"This is where you were born," Mr. Head said. "You can ast one **yourself** if you want to."

Nelson was afraid of the colored men and he didn't want to be **laughed** at by the colored children. Up ahead he saw a large **colored** woman leaning in a doorway that opened onto the **side walk.** Her hair stood straight out from her head for about four **inches** all around and she was resting on bare brown feet that **turned** pink at the sides. She had on a pink dress that showed her **exact** shape. As they came abreast of her, she lazily lifted one hand **to her** head and her fingers disappeared into her hair.

Nelson stopped. He felt his breath drawn up by the woman's dark **eye*.** "How do you get back to town?" he said in a voice that did **not sound** like his own.

After a minute she said, "You in town now," in a rich low tone that made Nelson feel as if a cool spray had been turned on him. "How do you get back to the train?" he said in the same rccdlike voice. "You can catch you a car," she said. He understood she was making fun o£ him but he was too

paralyzed even to scowl. He stood drinking in every detail of her. His eyes traveled up from her great knees to her forehead and then made a triangular path

from the glistening sweat on her neck down and across her tremendous bosom and over her bare arm back to where her fingers lay hidden in her hair. He suddenly wanted her to reach down and pick him up and draw him against her and then he wanted to feel her breath on his face. He wanted to look down and down into her eyes while she held him tighter and tighter. He had never had such a feeling before. He felt as if he were reeling down through a pitchblack tunnel.

"You can go a block down yonder and catch you a car take you to the railroad station, Sugarpie," she said.

Nelson would have collapsed at her feet if Mr. Head had not pulled him roughly away. "You act like you don't have any sense!" the old man growled.

They hurried down the street and Nelson did not look back at the woman. He pushed his hat sharply forward over his face which was already burning with shame. The sneering ghost he had seen in the train window and all the foreboding feelings he had on *the* way returned to him and he remembered that his ticket from the scale had said to beware of dark women and that his grandfather's had said he was upright and brave. He took hold of the old man's hand, a sign of dependence that he seldom showed.

They headed down the street toward the car tracks where a long yellow rattling trolley was coming. Mr. Head had never boarded a streetcar and he let that one pass. Nelson was silent. From time to time his mouth trembled slightly but his grandfather, occupied with his own problems, paid him no attention. They stood on **the** corner and neither looked at the Negroes who were passing, going about their business just as if they had been white, except that **moat** of them stopped and eyed Mr. Head and Nelson. It occurred to Mr. Head that since the streetcar ran on tracks, they could simply follow the tracks. He gave Nelson a slight push and explained **that** they would follow the tracks on into the railroad station, walking, and they set off.

Presently to tlieir great relief they began to see white people again **and** Nelson sat down on the sidewalk against the wall of a building. "I got to rest myself some," he said. "You lost the sack and the direction. You can just wait on me to rest myself."

"There's the tracks in front of us," Mr. Head said. "All we got to **do** is keep them in sight and you could have remembered the sack a* good as me. This is where you were born. This is your old home **town.** This is your second trip. You ought to know how to do," **and** he squatted down and continued in this vein but the boy, easing his burning feet out of his shoes, did not answer.

"And standing there grinning like a chim-pan-zee while a nigger **woman** gives you direction. Great Gawd!" Mr. Head said.

"I never said I was nothing but born here," the boy said in a shaky **voice. "I** never said I would or wouldn't like it. I never said I wanted to come. I only said I was born here and I never had nothing to do **with** that. I want to go home. I never wanted to come in the first **place.** It was all your big idea. How you know you ain't following **the** tracks in the wrong direction?"

This last had occurred to Mr. Head too. "All these people are **white,"** he said.

"We ain't passed here before," Nelson said. This was a neighborhood of brick buildings that might have been lived in or might **not.** A few empty automobiles were parked along the curb and **there** was an occasional passerby. The heat of the pavement came **up** through Nelson's thin suit. His eyelids began to droop, and after **a few** minutes his head tilted forward. His shoulders twitched once **or** twice and then he fell over on his side and lay sprawled in an **exhausted** fit of sleep.

Mr. Head watched him silently. He was very tired himself but **they** could not both sleep at the same time and he could not have **ikpt** anyway because he did not know where he was. In a few **minutes** Nelson would wake up, refreshed by his sleep and very **cocky,** and would begin complaining that he had lost the sack and **the** way. You'd have a mighty sorry time if I wasn't here, Mr. **Head** thought; and then another idea occurred to him. He looked at **the** sprawled figure for several minutes; presently he stood up.

He justified what he was going to do on the grounds that it is sometimes necessary to teach a child a lesson he won't forget, particularly when the child is always reasserting his position with some new impudence. He walked without a sound to the corner about twenty feet away and sat down on a covered garbage can in the alley where he could look out and watch Nelson wake up alone.

The boy was dozing fitfully, half conscious of vague noises and black forms moving up from some dark part of him into the light. His face worked in his sleep and he had pulled his knees up under his chin. The sun shed a dull dry light on the narrow street; everything looked like exactly what it was. After a while Mr. Head, hunched like an old monkey on the garbage can lid, decided that if Nelson didn't wake up soon, he would make a loud noise by bamming his foot against the can. He looked at his watch and discovered that it was two o'clock. Their train left at six and the possibility of missing it was too awful for him to think of. He kicked his foot backwards on the can and a hollow boom reverberated in the alley.

Nelson shot up onto his feet with a shout. He looked where his grandfather should have been and stared. He seemed to whirl several times and then, picking

up his feet and throwing his head back, he dashed down the street like a wild maddened pony. Mr. Head jumped off the can and galloped after but the child was almost out of sight. He saw a streak of gray disappearing diagonally a block ahead. He ran as fast as he could, looking both ways down every intersection, but without sight of him again. Then as he passed the third intersection, completely winded, he saw about half a block down die street a scene that stopped him altogether. He crouched behind a trash box to watch and get his bearings.

Nelson was sitting with both legs spread out and by his side lay an elderly woman, screaming. Groceries were scattered about the sidewalk. A crowd of women had already gathered to see jus tice done and Mr. Head distinctly heard the old woman on the pavement shout, "You've broken my ankle and your daddy'll pay for it! Every nickel! Police! Police!" Several of the women were plucking at Nelson's shoulder but the boy seemed too dazed to get up.

Something forced Mr. Head from behind the trash box and forward, but only at a creeping pace. He had never in his life been accosted by a policeman. The women were milling around Nelson as if they might suddenly all dive on him at once and tear him to pieces, and die old woman continued to scream that her ankle was broken and to call for an officer. Mr. Head came on so slowly that he could have been taking a backward step after each forward one, but when he was about ten feet away, Nelson saw him and sprang. The child caught him around the hips and clung panting against him.

The women all turned on Mr. Head. The injured one sat up and shouted, "You sir! You'll pay every penny of my doctor's bill that your boy has caused. He's a juve-nile deliquentl Where is an officer? Somebody take this man's name and address!"

Mr. Head was trying to detach Nelson's fingers from the flesh in the back of his legs. The old man's head had lowered itself into his collar like a turtle's; his eyes were glazed with fear and caution.

"Your boy has broken my ankle!" the old woman shouted. "Police!"

Mr. Head sensed the approach of the policeman from behind. He stared straight ahead at the women who were massed in their fury like a solid wall to block his escape, "This is not my boy," he said. "I never seen him before."

He felt Nelson's fingers fall out of his flesh.

The women dropped back, staring at him with horror, as if they were so repulsed by a man who would deny his own image and likeness that diey could not bear to lay hands on him. Mr. Head walked on, through a space they silently

cleared, and left Nelson behind. Ahead of him he saw nothing but a hollow tunnel that had once been the street.

The boy remained standing where he was, his neck craned forward and his hands hanging by his sides. His hat was jammed on his head so that there were no longer any creases in it. The injured woman got up and shook her fist at him and the others gave him pitying looks, but he didn't notice any of them. There was no policeman in sight.

In a minute he began to move mechanically, making no effort to catch up with his grandfather but merely following at about twenty paces. They walked on for five blocks in this way. Mr. Head's shoulders were sagging and his neck hung forward at such an angle that it was not visible from behind. He was afraid to turn his head. Finally he cut a short hopeful glance over his shoulder. Twenty feet behind him, he saw two small eyes piercing into his back like pitchfork prongs.

The boy was not of a forgiving nature but diis was the first time he had ever had anything to forgive. Mr. Head had never disgraced himself before. After two more blocks, he turned and called over his shoulder in a high desperately gay voice, "Let's us go get us a Co' Cola somewheres!"

Nelson, with a dignity he had never shown before, turned and stood with his back to his grandfather.

Mr. Head began to feel the depth of his denial. His face as they walked on became all hollows and bare ridges. He saw nothing they were passing but he perceived that they had lost the car tracks. There was no dome to be seen anywhere and the afternoon was advancing. He knew that if dark overtook them in the city, they would be beaten and robbed. The speed of God's justice **was** only what he expected for himself, but he could not stand to think that his sins would be visited upon Nelson and that even now, he was leading the boy to his doom.

They continued to walk on block after block through an endless section of small brick houses until Mr. Head almost fell over **a** water spigot sticking up about six inches off the edge of a **grass** plot. He had not had a drink of water since early morning **but** he felt he did not deserve it now. Then he thought that Nelson would be thirsty and they would both drink and be brought to gether. He squatted down and put his mouth to the nozzle **and** turned a cold stream of water into his throat. Then he called **out** in the high desperate voice, "Come on and getcher some waterl"

This time die child stared through him for nearly sixty seconds.

Mr. Head got up and walked on as if he had drunk poison. Nelson,

though he had not had water since some he had drunk out of **a** paper cup on the train, passed by die spigot, disdaining to **drink** where his grandfather had. When Mr. Head realized this, he **lost** all hope. His face in the waning afternoon light looked ravaged and abandoned. He could feel tlie boy's steady hate, traveling at an even pace behind him and he knew that (if by some miracle they escaped being murdered in the city) it would continue just that way for the rest of his life. He knew that now he was wandering into a black strange place where nothing was like it had ever been before, a long old age without respect and an end that would be welcome because it would be the end.

As for Nelson, his mind had frozen around his grandfather's treachery as if he were trying to preserve it intact to present at the final judgment. He walked without looking to one side or the other, but every now and then his mouth would twitch and this was when he felt, from some remote place inside himself, a black mysterious form reach up as if it would melt his frozen vision in one hot grasp.

The sun dropped down behind a row of houses and hardly noticing, they passed into an elegant suburban section where mansions were set back from the road by lawns with birdbaths on them. Here everything was entirely deserted. For blocks they didn't pass even a dog. The big white houses were like partially submerged icebergs in tlie distance. There were no sidewalks, only drives, and these wound around and around in endless ridiculous circles. Nelson made no move to come nearer to Mr. Head. The old man felt that if he saw a sewer entrance he would drop down into it and let himself be carried away; and he could imagine the **boy** standing by, watching with only a slight interest, while he disappeared.

A loud bark jarred him to attention and he looked up to see a **fat** man approaching with two bulldogs. He waved both arms like someone shipwrecked on a desert island. "I'm lostl" he called. "I'm **lost** and can't find my way and me and this boy have got to catch this train and I can't find the station. Oh Gawd I'm lostl Oh hep me Gawd I'm lost!"

The man, who was bald-headed and had on golf knickers, asked him what train he was trying to catch and Mr. Head began to get **out** bis tickets, trembling so violently he could hardly hold them.

Nelson had come up to within fifteen feet and stood watching.

"Well," the fat man said, giving him back the tickets, "you won't have time to get back to town to make this but you can catch it at the suburb stop. That's three blocks from here," and he began explaining how to get there.

Mr. Head stared as if he were slowly returning from the dead and when the man had finished and gone off with the dogs jumping at his heels, he turned to

Nelson and said breathlessly, "We're going to get home!"

The child was standing about ten feet away, his face bloodless under the gray hat. His eyes were triumphantly cold. There was no light in them, no feeling, no interest. He was merely there, a small figure, waiting. Home was nothing to him.

Mr. Head turned slowly. He felt he knew now what time would be like without seasons and what heat would be like without light and what man would be like without salvation. He didn't care if he never made the train and if it had not been for what suddenly caught his attention, like a cry out of the gathering dusk, he might have forgotten there was a station to go to.

He had not walked five hundred yards down the road when **he** saw, within reach of him, the plaster figure of a Negro sitting bent over on a low yellow brick fence that curved around a wide lawn. The Negro was about Nelson's size and he was pitched forward at an unsteady angle because the putty that held him to the wall had cracked. One of his eyes was entirely white and he held a piece of brown watermelon.

Mr. Head stood looking at him silently until Nelson stopped at a little distance. Then as the two of them stood there, Mr. Head breathed, "An artificial nigger!"

It was not possible to tell if the artificial Negro were meant to be young or old; he looked too miserable to be either. He was meant to look happy because his mouth was stretched up at the corner! but the chipped eye and the angle he was cocked at gave him a wild look of misery instead.

"An artificial nigger!" Nelson repeated in Mr. Head's exact tone.

The two of them stood there with their necks forward at **almost** the same angle and their shoulders curved in almost exactly **the** same way and their hands trembling identically in their **pockets.** Mr. Head looked like an ancient child and Nelson like a miniature old man. They stood gazing at the artificial Negro as if they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat. They could both feel it dissolving their differences like an action of flaercy. Mr. Head had never known before what mercy felt like because he had been too good to deserve any, but he felt he knew now. He looked at Nelson and understood that he must say something to the child to show that he was still wise and in the look **the** boy returned he saw a hungry need for that assurance. Nelson's eyes seemed to implore him to explain once and for all the mystery pf existence.

Mr. Head opened his lips to make a lofty statement and heard himself say, "They ain't got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one."

After a second, the boy nodded with a strange shivering about his mouth, and said, "Let's go home before we get ourselves lost again."

Their train glided into the suburb stop just as they reached the station and they boarded it together, and ten minutes before it was due to arrive at the junction, they went to the door and stood ready to jump off if it did not stop; but it did, just as the moon, restored to its full splendor, sprang from a cloud and flooded the clearing with light. As they stepped off, the sage grass was shivering gendy in shades of silver and the clinkers under their feet glittered with a fresh black light. The treetops, fencing the junction **like** the protecting walls of a garden, were darker than the sky which was hung with gigantic white clouds illuminated like lanterns.

Mr. Head stood very still and felt the action of mercy touch him again but this time he knew that there were no words in the world **that** could name it. He understood that it grew out of agony, which is not denied to any man and which is given in strange ways to children. He understood it was all a man could carry into death to give his Maker and he suddenly burned with shame that he had 10 little of it to take with him. He stood appalled, judging himself **with** the thoroughness of God, while the action of mercy covered his pride like a flame and consumed it. He had never thought himself a great sinner before but he saw now that his true depravity had been hidden from him lest it cause him despair. He realized that he was forgiven for sins from die beginning of time, when he had conceived in his own heart die sin of Adam, until the present, when he had denied poor Nelson. He saw diat no sin was too monstrous for him to claim as his own, and since God loved in proportion as He forgave, he felt ready at diat instant to enter Paradise.

Nelson, composing his expression under the shadow of his hat brim, watched him widi a mixture of fatigue and suspicion, but as the train glided past them and disappeared like a frightened serpent into the woods, even his face lightened and he muttered, "I'm glad I've went once, but I'll never go back again!"

Good Country People

BESIDES the neutral expression that she wore when she was alone, Mrs. Freeman had two others, forward and reverse, **that** she used for all her human dealings. Her forward expression was steady and driving like the advance of a heavy truck. Her eyes never swerved to left or right but turned as the story turned as if they followed a yellow line down the center of it. She seldom used the other expression because it was not often necessary for her to retract a statement, but when she did, her face came to a complete stop, there was an almost imperceptible movement of her black eyes, during which they seemed to be receding, and then the observer would see that Mrs. Freeman, though she might stand there as **real** as several grain sacks thrown on top of each other, was no longer there in spirit. As for getting anything across to her when this was the case, Mrs. Hopewell had given it up. She might talk **her** head off. Mrs. Freeman could never be brought to admit herself wrong on any point. She would stand there and if she could be brought to say anything, it was something like, "Well, I wouldn't of said it was and I wouldn't of said it wasn't," or letting her gaze **range** over the top kitchen shelf where there was an assortment of dusty bottles, she might remark, "I see you ain't ate many of **them** figs you put up last summer."

They carried on their most important business in the kitchen at breakfast. Every morning Mrs. Hopewell got up at seven o'clock **and** lit her gas heater and Joy's. Joy was her daughter, a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg. Mrs. Hopewell thought of her as a child though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated. **Joy** would get up while her mother was eating and lumber into **the** bathroom and slam die door, and before long, Mrs. Freeman

would arrive at the back door. Joy would hear her motiier call, "Come on in," and then they would talk for a while in low voices that were indistinguishable in the bathroom. By the time Joy came in, they had usually finished the weather report and were on one or the other of Mrs. Freeman's daughters, Glynese or Carramae, Joy called them Glycerin and Caramel. Glynese, a redhead, was eighteen and had many admirers; Carramae, a blonde, was only fifteen but already married and pregnant. She could not keep anything on her stomach. Every morning Mrs. Freeman told Mrs. Hopewell how many times she had vomited since tiie last report.

Mrs. Hopewell liked to tell people that Glynese and Carramae were two of tiie

finest girls she knew and tliat Mrs. Freeman was a *lady* and that she was never ashamed to take her anywhere or introduce her to anybody they might meet. Then she would tell how she had happened to hire the Freemans in the first place and how they were a godsend to her and how she had had tliem four years. The reason for her keeping them so long was that they were not trash. They were good country people. She had telephoned the man whose name they had given as a reference and he had told her that Mr. Freeman was a good farmer but that his wife was the nosiest woman ever to walk the earth. "She's got to be into everything," the man said. "If she don't get there before the dust setdes, you can bet she's dead, that's all. She'll want to know all your business. I can stand him real good," he had said, "but me nor my wife neither could have stood that woman one more minute on this place." That had put Mrs. Hopewell off for a few days.

She had hired them in the end because there were no otlier ap plicants but she had made up her mind beforehand exactly how she would handle the woman. Since she was the type who had to be into everything, then, Mrs. Hopewell had decided, she would not only let her be into everything, she would *see to it* tliat she was into everything—she would give her the responsibility of everything, she would put her in charge. Mrs. Hopewell had no bad qualities of her own but she was able to use other people's in such a con structive way that she never felt the lack. She had hired the Free mans and she had kept tliem four years.

Nothing is perfect. This was one of Mrs. Hopewell's favorite say ings. Another was: that is life! And still another, the most important, was: well, other people have their opinions too. She would make these statements, usually at the table, in a tone o£ gentle insistence as if no one held them but her, and the large hulking **Joy,** whose constant outrage had obliterated every expression from **her** face, would stare just a little to the side of her, her eyes icy blue, with the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it.

When Mrs. Hopewell said to Mrs. Freeman that life was like that, Mrs. Freeman would say, "I always said so myself." Nothing **had** been arrived at by anyone that had not first been arrived at by **her.** She was quicker than Mr.

Freeman. When Mrs. Hopewell **said** to her after they had been on the place a while, "You know, you're the wheel behind the wheel," and winked, Mrs. Freeman **had** said, "I know it. I've always been quick. It's some that are quicker than others."

"Everybody is different," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Yes, most people is," Mrs. Freeman said.

"It takes all kinds to make the world."

"I always said it did myself."

The girl was used to this kind of dialogue for breakfast and more of it for dinner; sometimes they had it for supper too. When **they** had no guest they ate in the kitchen because that was easier. **Mrs.** Freeman always managed to arrive at some point during **the** meal and to watch them finish it. She would stand in the door way if. it were summer but in the winter she would stand with **one** elbow on top of the refrigerator and look down on them, or (he would stand by tlie gas heater, lifting the back of her skirt **slightly.** Occasionally she would stand against the wall and roll **her** head from side to side. At no time was she in any hurry to leave. **All** this was very trying on Mrs. Hopewell but she was a woman of **great** patience. She realized that nothing is perfect and that in the **Frcemans** she had good country people and that if, in this day and **age,** you get good country people, you had better hang onto them.

She had had plenty of experience witli trash. Before the Free **tnans** she had averaged one tenant family a year. The wives of **these** farmers were not the kind you would want to be around you for very long. Mrs. Hopewell, who had divorced her husband long ago, needed someone to walk over die fields with her; and when Joy had to be impressed for these services, her remarks were usually so ugly and her face so glum that Mrs. Hopewell would say, "If you can't come pleasantly, I don't want you at all," to which the girl, standing square and rigid-shouldered with her neck thrust slightly forward, would reply, "If you want me, here I am— LIKE I AM."

Mrs. Hopewell excused this attitude because of die leg (which had been shot off in a hunting accident when Joy was ten). It was hard for Mrs. Hopewell to realize uiat her child was thirty-two now and that for more dian twenty years she had had only one leg. She thought of her still as a child because it tore her heart to think instead of the poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any *normal* good times. Her name was really Joy but as soon as she was twenty-one and away from home, she had had it legally changed. Mrs. Hopewell was certain diat **she** had thought and thought until she had hit upon die ugliest

name in any language. Then she had gone and had die beautiful name, Joy, changed widiout telling her mother until after she had done it. Her legal name was Hulga.

When Mrs. Hopewell thought the name, Hulga, she thought **of** the broad blank hull of a battleship. She would not use it. **She** continued to call her Joy to which the girl responded but in a purely mechanical way.

Hulga had learned to tolerate Mrs. Freeman who saved her from taking walks with her modier. Even Glynese and Carramae **were** useful when they occupied attention diat might otherwise have **been** directed at her. At first she had diought she could not stand Mn. Freeman for she had found that it was not possible to be rude **to** her. Mrs. Freeman would take on strange resentments and **for** days togedier she would be sullen but the source of her displeasure was always obscure; a direct attack, a positive leer, blatant **ugliness** to her face—diese never touched her. And widiout warning **one** day, she began calling her Hulga.

She did not call her that in front of Mrs. Hopewell who **would** have been incensed but when she and the girl happened to be **out** of the house together, she would say something and add the name Hulga to die end of it, and the big spectacled Joy-Hulga would scowl and redden as if her privacy had been intruded upon. She considered the name her personal affair. She had arrived at it first purely on the basis of its ugly sound and then the full genius of its fitness had struck her. She had a vision of the name working like the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called. She saw it as the name of her highest creative act. One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga. However, Mrs. Freeman's relish for using the name only irritated her. It was as if Mrs. Freeman's beady steel-pointed eyes had penetrated far enough behind her face to reach some secret fact. Something about her seemed to fascinate Mrs. Freeman and then one day Hulga realized that it was the artificial leg. Mrs. Freeman had a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, assaults upon children. Of diseases, she preferred the lingering or incurable. Hulga had heard Mrs. Hopewell give her the details of the hunting accident, how the leg had been literally blasted off, how she had never lost consciousness. Mrs. Freeman could listen to it any time as if it had happened an hour ago.

When Hulga stumped into the kitchen in the morning (she could walk without making the awful noise but she made it— Mrs. Hopewell was certain—because it was ugly-sounding), she glanced at them and did not speak. Mrs. Hopewell would be in her red kimono with her hair tied around her head in rags. She would be sitting at the table, finishing her breakfast and Mrs. Freeman would be hanging by her elbow outward from the refrigerator, looking down at the table. Hulga always put her eggs on the stove to boil and then stood over them with her arms folded, and Mrs. Hopewell would look at her—a kind of indirect gaze divided between her and Mrs. Freeman—and would think that if she would only keep herself up a little, she wouldn't be so bad looking. There was nothing wrong with her face that a pleasant expression wouldn't help. Mrs. Hopewell said that people who looked on the bright side of things would be beautiful even if they were not.

Whenever she looked at Joy this way, she could not help but feel that it would have been better if the child had not taken the PhD. It had certainly not brought her out any and now that she had it, there was no more excuse for her to go to school again. Mrs. Hopewell thought it was nice for girls to go to school to have a good time but Joy had "gone through." Anyhow, she would not have been strong enough to go again. The doctors had told Mrs. Hopewell that with die best of care, Joy might see forty-five. She had a weak heart. Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for diis condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about. And Mrs. Hopewell could very well picture her there, looking like a scarecrow and lecturing to more of die same. Here she went about all day in a six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it. She diought this was funny; Mrs. Hopewell diought it was idiotic and showed simply txiat she was still a child. She wai brilliant but she didn't have a grain of sense. It seemed to Mri. Hopewell diat every year she grew less like other people and more like herself—bloated, rude, and squint-eyed. And she said such strange things! To her own mother she had said—without warning, without excuse, standing up in the middle of a meal widi her face purple and her moudi half full—"Woman I do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not?* God!" she had cried sinking down again and staring at her plate, "Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!" Mrs. Hopewell had no idea to diis day what brought that on. She had only made the remark, hoping Joy would take it in, that a smile never hurt anyone.

The girl had taken the Ph.D. in philosophy and this left Mr*. Hopewell at a

complete loss. You could say, "My daughter is a nurse," or "My daughter is a schoolteacher," or even, "My daughter is a chemical engineer." You could not say, "My daughter is a philosopher." That was something that had ended with the Greeks and Romans. All day Joy sat on her neck in a deep chair, reading. Sometimes she went for walks but she didn't like dogs or cat* or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men. She looked at nice young men as if she could smell dieir srnnirlirv

One day Mrs. Hopewell had picked up one of the books the **girl** had just put down and opening it at random, she read, "Science, on the other hand, has to assert its soberness and seriousness afresh **and** declare that it is concerned solely with what-is. Nothing—how **can** it be for science anydiing but a horror and a phantasm? If **science** is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of nothing. Such is after all the strictly scientific approach **to** Nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing." **These** words had been underlined with a blue pencil and they worked on Mrs. Hopewell like some evil incantation in gibberish. **She** shut the book quickly and went out of die room as if she **were** having a chill.

This morning when the girl came in, Mrs. Freeman was on Carramae. "She thrown up four times after supper," she said, "and **was** up twict in the night after three o'clock. Yesterday she didn't do **nothing** but ramble in the bureau drawer. All she did. Stand up **there** and see what she could run up on."

"She's got to eat," Mrs. Hopewell muttered, sipping her coffee, **while** she watched Joy's back at die stove. She was wondering what **the** child had said to the Bible salesman. She could not imagine **what** kind of a conversation she could possibly have had with him.

He was a tall gaunt hatless youth who had called yesterday to **tell** them a Bible. He had appeared at the door, carrying a large **black** suitcase that weighted him so heavily on one side that he had **to** brace himself against the door facing. He seemed on the point **of** collapse but he said in a cheerful voice. "Good morning, Mrs. **Cedars** I" and set the suitcase down on the mat. He was not a bad-**looking** young man though he had on a bright blue suit and yellow **socks** that were not pulled up far enough. He had prominent face **bones** and a streak of sticky-looking brown hair falling across his **forehead.**

T m Mrs. Hopewell," she said.

"Oh!" he said, pretending to look puzzled but with his eyes sparkling, "I saw it said 'The Cedars' on the mailbox so I thought you **was** Mrs. Cedars!" and he burst out in a pleasant laugh. He picked up **the** satchel and under cover of a pant, he fell forward into her **hall. It** was rather as if the suitcase had moved first, jerking him **after** it. "Mrs. Hopewell!" he said and grabbed her hand. "I hope

you are well I" and he laughed again and then all at once his face sobered completely. He paused and gave her a straight earnest look and said, "Lady, I've come to speak of serious things."

"Well, come in," she muttered, none too pleased because her dinner was almost ready. He came into the parlor and sat down on die edge of a straight chair and put the suitcase between his feet and glanced around the room as if he were sizing her up by it. Her silver gleamed on the two sideboards; she decided he had never been in a room as elegant as this.

"Mrs. Hopewell," he began, using her name in a way that sounded almost intimate, "I know you believe in Chrustian service."

"Well yes," she murmured.

"I know," he said and paused, looking very wise with his head cocked on one side, "that you're a good woman. Friends have told me." Mrs. Hopewell never liked to be taken for a fool. "What are you selling?" she asked.

"Bibles," the young man said and his eye raced around the room before he added, "I see you have no family Bible in your parlor, I see that is the one lack you got!"

Mrs. Hopewell could not say, "My daughter is an atheist and won't let me keep the Bible in the parlor." She said, stiffening slightly, "I keep my Bible by my bedside." This was not the truth. It was in the attic somewhere.

"Lady," he said, "the word of God ought to be in the parlor."

"Well, I tliink that's a matter of taste," she began. "I think . . ."

"Lady," he said, "for a Chrustian, the word of God ought to be in every room in the house besides in his heart. I know you're a Chrustian because I can see it in every line of your face."

She stood up and said, "Well, young man, I don't want to buy a Bible and I smell my dinner burning."

He didn't get up. He began to twist his hands and looking down at tliem, he said softly, "Well lady, I'll tell you the truth—not many people want to buy one nowadays and besides, I know I'm real simple. I don't know how to say a thing but to say it. I'm just a country boy." He glanced up into her unfriendly face. "People like you don't like to fool with country people like me!"

"Why!" she cried, "good country people are the salt of the earth! Besides, we all have different ways of doing, it takes all kinds to make the world go 'round. That's life!"

"You said a mouthful," he said.

"Why, I think there aren't enough good country people in the world I" she said, stirred. "I think that's what's wrong with it I"

His face had brightened. "I didn't inraduce myself," he said. "I'm Manley Pointer from out in the country around Willohobie, not even from a place, just from near a place."

"You wait a minute," she said. "I have to see about my dinner." She went out to the kitchen and found Joy standing near the door where she had been listening.

"Get rid of die salt of the earth," she said, "and let's eat."

Mrs. Hopewell gave her a pained look and turned the heat down under the vegetables. "/ can't be rude to anybody," she murmured and went back into die parlor.

He had opened die suitcase and was sitting with a Bible on each knee. "You might as well put those up," she told him. "I don't want one." "I appreciate your honesty," he said. "You don't see any more real honest people unless you go way out in the country." "I know," she said, "real genuine folks I" Through the crack in die door she heard a groan.

"I guess a lot of boys come telling you they're working their way dirough college," he said, "but I'm not going to tell you tliat. Somehow," he said, "I don't want to go to college. I want to devote my life to Chrustian service. See," he said, lowering his voice, "I got this heart condition. I may not live long. When you know it's something wrong with you and you may not live long, well then, lady . . ." He paused, with his mouth open, and stared at her.

He and Joy had the same condition I She knew that her eyes were filling with tears but she collected herself quickly and murmured, "Won't you stay for dinner? We'd love to have you!" and was sorry the instant she heard herself say it.

"Yes mam," he said in an abashed voice, "I would sher love to do that!"

Joy had given him one look on being introduced to him and dien diroughout the meal had not glanced at him again. He had addressed several remarks to her, which she had pretended not to hear. Mrs. Hopewell could not understand deliberate rudeness, although she lived widi it, and she felt she had always to overflow widi hospitality to make up for Joy's lack of courtesy. She urged him to talk about himself and he did. He said he was die seventh child of twelve and diat his fadier had been crushed under a tree when he himself was eight year old. He had been crushed very badly, in fact, almost cut in two and was practically not recognizable. His modier had got along die best she could by hard working

and she had always seen diat her children went to Sunday School and diat diey read the Bible every evening. He was now nineteen year old and he had been selling Bibles for four mondis. In that time he had sold seventy-seven Bibles and had die promise of two more sales. He wanted to become, a missionary because he thought diat was die way you could do most for people. "He who losest his life shall find it," he said simply and he was so sincere, so genuine and earnest diat Mrs. Hopewell would not for the world have smiled. He prevented his peas from sliding onto die table by blocking diem with a piece of bread which he later cleaned his plate with. She could see Joy observing sidewise how he handled his knife and fork and she saw too that every few minutes, die boy would dart a keen appraising glance at the girl as if he were trying to attract her attention.

After dinner Joy cleared the dishes off die table and disappeared and Mrs. Hopewell was left to talk widi him. He told her again about his childhood and his father's accident and about varioui diings that had happened to him. Every five minutes or so she would stifle a yawn. He sat for two hours until finally she told him **she** must go because she had an appointment in town. He packed **his** Bibles and thanked her and prepared to leave, but in die doorway he stopped and wrung her hand and said diat not on any of his **trips** had he met a lady as nice as her and he asked if he could come again. She had said she would always be happy to see him.

Joy had been standing in die road, apparently looking at something in die distance, when he came down die steps toward **her,** bent to the side with his heavy valise. He stopped where she **was** standing and confronted her directly. Mrs. Hopewell could not hear what he said but she trembled to think what Joy would say to him. She could see diat after a minute Joy said something and that dien die boy began to speak again, making an excited gesture widi his free hand. After a minute Joy said something else at which the boy began to speak once more. Then to her amazement, Mrs. Hopewell saw die two of diem walk off together, toward die gate. Joy had walked all die way to die gate with him and Mrs. Hopewell could not imagine what diey had said to each other, and she had not yet dared to ask.

Mrs. Freeman was insisting upon her attention. She had moved from die refrigerator to die heater so diat Mrs. Hopewell had to turn and face her in order to seem to be listening. "Glynese gone out widi Harvey Hill again last night," she said. "She had diis sty."

"Hill," Mrs. Hopewell said absently, "is that die one who works in die garage?"

"Nome, he's the one that goes to chiropracter school," Mrs. Freeman said.

"She had diis sty. Been had it two days. So she says when he brought her in die odier night he says, 'Lemme get rid of diat sty for you,' and she says, 'How?' and he says, 'You just lay yourself down acrost die seat of that car and I'll show you.' So she done it and he popped her neck. Kept on a-popping it several times until she made him quit. This morning," Mrs. Freeman said, "she ain't got no sty. She ain't got no traces of a sty."

"I never heard of diat before," Mrs. Hopewell said. "He ast her to marry him before the Ordinary," Mrs. Freeman went on, "and she told him she wasn't going to be married in no

office"

"Well, Glynese is a fine girl," Mrs. Hopewell said. "Glynese and Carramae are bodi fine girls."

"Carramae said when her and Lyman was married Lyman said it sure felt sacred to him. She said he said he wouldn't take five hundred dollars for being married by a preacher."

"How much would he take?" the girl asked from the stove. "He said he wouldn't take five hundred dollars," Mrs. Freeman repeated. ^Well we all have work to do," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Lyman said it just felt more sacred to him," Mrs. Freeman said. "The doctor wants Carramae to eat prunes. Says instead of medicine. Says them cramps is coming from pressure. You know where I dunk it is?"

"She'll be better in a few weeks," Mrs. Hopewell said. "In die tube," Mrs. Freeman said. "Else she wouldn't be as sick as she is."

Hulga had cracked her two eggs into a saucer and was bringing diem to die table along widi a cup of coffee diat she had filled too full. She sat down carefully and began to eat, meaning to keep Mrs. Freeman diere by questions if for any reason she showed an inclination to leave. She could perceive her modier's eye on her. The first round-about question would be about die Bible salesman and she did not "wish to bring it on. "How did he pop her neck?" she asked.

Mrs. Freeman went into a description of how he had popped **her** neck. She said he owned a '55 Mercury but diat Glynese said she would rather marry a man widi only a '36 Plymoudi who would be married by a preacher. The girl asked what if he had a '32 Plymoudi and Mrs. Freeman said what Glynese had said was a '36 Plymoudi.

Mrs. Hopewell said diere were not many girls widi Glynese's common sense. She said what she admired in diose girls was dieir

common sense. She said that reminded her diat diey had had a nice visitor yesterday, a young man selling Bibles. "Lord," she said, "he bored me to death but he was so sincere and genuine I couldn't be rude to him. He was just good country people, you know," she said, "—just die salt of die eardi."

"I seen him walk up," Mrs. Freeman said, "and dien later—**I seen** him walk off," and Hulga could feel die slight shift in her voice, die slight insinuation, that he had not walked off alone, had he? Her face remained expressionless but die color rose into her neck and she seemed to swallow it down widi die next spoonful of egg. Mrs. Freeman was looking at her as if diey had a secret togedier.

"Well, it takes all kinds of people to make die world go 'round," Mrs. Hopewell said. "It's very good we aren't all alike."

"Some people are more alike dian odiers," Mrs. Freeman said.

Hulga got up and stumped, widi about twice die noise diat **was** necessary, into her room and locked die door. She was to meet **die** Bible salesman at ten o'clock at the gate. She had diought about it half the night. She had started thinking of it as a great joke and then she had begun to see profound implications in it. She had lain in bed imagining dialogues for them that were insane on the surface but diat reached below to depdis diat no Bible salesman would be aware of. Their conversation yesterday had been of this kind.

He had stopped in front of her and had simply stood there. His face was bony and sweaty and bright, with a little pointed nose in the center of it, and his look was different from what it had been at the dinner table. He was gazing at her widi open curiosity, with fascination, like a child watching a new fantastic animal at die zoo, and he was breathing as if he had run a great distance to reach her. His gaze seemed somehow familiar but she could not diink where she had been regarded with it before. For almost a minute he didn't say anydiing. Then on what seemed an insuck of breath, he whispered, "You ever ate a chicken that was two days old?"

The girl looked at him stonily. He might have just put diis question up for consideration at die meeting of a philosophical association. "Yes," she presently replied as if she had considered it from all angles.

"It must have been mighty small I" he said triumphantly and shook all over widi little nervous giggles, getting very red in die face, and subsiding finally into his gaze of complete admiration, while die girl's expression remained exactly the same.

"How old are you?" he asked softly. She waited some time before she answered.

Then in a flat voice she said, "Seventeen."

His smiles came in succession like waves breaking on die surface of a little lake. "I see you got a wooden leg," he said. "I diink you're brave. I diink you're real sweet."

The girl stood blank and solid and silent.

"Walk to die gate widi me," he said. "You're a brave sweet little thing and I liked you die minute I seen you walk in die door." Hulga began to move forward.

"What's your name?" he asked, smiling down on die top of her

head.

"Hulga," she said.

"Hulga," he murmured, "Hulga. Hulga. I never heard of anybody name Hulga before. You're shy, aren't you, Hulga?" he asked. She nodded, watching his large red hand on the handle of the giant valise.

"I like girls that wear glasses," he said. "I think a lot. I'm not like these people that a serious thought don't ever enter their heads. It's because I may die."

"I may die too," she said suddenly and looked up at him. His eyes were very small and brown, glittering feverishly.

"Listen," he said, "don't you think some people was meant to meet on account of what all they got in common and all? Like they both think serious thoughts and all?" He shifted the valise to his other hand so that the hand nearest her was free. He caught hold of her elbow and shook it a little. "I don't work on Saturday," he said. "I like to walk in the woods and see what Mother Nature is wearing. O'er the hills and far away. Pic-nics and things. Couldn't we go on a pic-nic tomorrow? Say yes, Hulga," he said and gave her a dying look as if he felt his insides about to drop out of him. He had even seemed to sway slightly toward her.

During die night she had imagined that she seduced him. She imagined diat die two of diem walked on die place until diey came to die storage barn beyond die two back fields and diere, she imagined, diat diings came to such a pass diat she very easily seduced him and diat dien, of course, she had to reckon widi his remorse. True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined diat she took his remorse in -hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful.

She set off for die gate at exactly ten o'clock, escaping widiout drawing Mrs. Hopewell's attention. She didn't take anydiing to eat, forgetting diat food is usually taken on a picnic. She wore a pair of slacks and a dirty white shirt, and

as an afterdiought, she had put some Vapex on die collar of it since she did not own any perfume. When she reached die gate no one was diere.

She looked up and down die empty highway and had die furious feeling diat she had been tricked, diat he had only meant to make her walk to the gate after the idea of him. Then suddenly he stood up, very tall, from behind a bush on die opposite embankment. Smiling, he lifted his hat which was new and wide-brimmed. He had not worn it yesterday and she wondered if he had bought it for **the** occasion. It was toast-colored with a red and white band around it and was slightly too large for him. He stepped from behind the bush still carrying die black valise. He had on die same suit and the same yellow socks sucked down in his shoes from walking. He crossed the highway and said, "I knew you'd come!"

The girl wondered acidly how he had known diis. She pointed to die valise and asked, "Why did you bring your Bibles?"

He took her elbow, smiling down on her as if he could not stop. "You can never tell when you'll need die word of God, Hulga," he said. She had a moment in which she doubted diat this was actually happening and then they began to climb the embankment. They went down into the pasture toward the woods. The boy walked lightly by her side, bouncing on his toes. The valise did not seem to be heavy today; he even swung it. They crossed half the pasture without saying anydiing and then, putting his hand easily on the small of her back, he asked softly, "Where does your wooden leg join on?"

She turned an ugly red and glared at him and for an instant the boy looked abashed. "I didn't mean you no harm," he said. "I only meant you're so brave and all. I guess God takes care of you."

"No," she said, looking forward and walking fast, "I don't even believe in God."

At diis he stopped and whistled. "No!" he exclaimed as if he were too astonished to say anydiing else.

She walked on and in a second he was bouncing at her side, fanning with his hat. "That's very unusual for a girl," he remarked, watching her out of die corner of his eye. When diey reached die **edge** of the wood, he put his hand on her back again and drew her against him without a word and kissed her heavily.

The kiss, which had more pressure dian feeling behind it, pro duced diat extra surge of adrenalin in die girl that enables one to **carry** a packed trunk out of a burning house, but in her, the power **went** at once to die brain. Even before he released her, her mind, clear and detached and ironic anyway, was regarding him from a

great distance, with amusement but widi pity. She had never been **kissed** before and she was pleased to discover that it was an unexceptional experience and all a matter of the mind's control. Some people might enjoy drain water if they were told it was vodka. When die boy, looking expectant but uncertain, pushed her gently away, she turned and walked on, saying nodiing as if such business, for her, were common enough.

He came along panting at her side, trying to help her when he saw a root that she might trip over. He caught and held back the long swaying blades of thorn vine until she had passed beyond them. She led the way and he came breadiing heavily behind her. Then diey came out on a sunlit hillside, sloping softly into another one a litde smaller. Beyond, they could see the rusted top of die old barn where die extra hay was stored.

The hill was sprinkled widi small pink weeds. "Then you ain't saved?" he asked suddenly, stopping.

The girl smiled. It was the first time she had smiled at him at all. "In my economy," she said, "I'm saved and you are damned but I told you I didn't believe in God."

Nothing seemed to destroy die boy's look of admiradon. He gazed at her now as if die fantastic animal at the zoo had put its paw dirough die bars and given him a loving poke. She diought he looked as if he wanted to kiss her again and she walked on before he had die chance.

"Ain't there somewheres we can sit down sometime?" he mur mured, his voice softening toward the end of die sentence.

"In that barn," she said.

They made for it rapidly as if k might slide away like a train.

It was a large two-story barn, cool and dark inside. The boy pointed up the ladder diat led into the loft and said, "It's too bad we can't go up there."

"Why can't we?" she asked.

"Yer leg," he said reverently.

The girl gave him a contemptuous look and putting bodi **hands** on die ladder, she climbed it while he stood below, apparendy awe struck. She pulled herself expertly through die opening and **then** looked down at him and said, "Well, come on if you're coming," **and** he began to climb die ladder, awkwardly bringing die suitcase **with** him.

"We won't need the Bible," she observed.

"You never can tell," he said, panting. After he had got into the loft, he was a few seconds catching his breath. She had sat down in a pile of straw. A wide sheath of sunlight, filled with dust particles, slanted over her. She lay back against a bale, her face turned away, looking out die front opening of die barn where hay was thrown from a wagon into die loft. The two pink-speckled hillsides lay back against a dark ridge of woods. The sky was cloudless and cold blue. The boy dropped down by her side and put one arm under her and the odier over her and began metiiodically kissing her face, making little noises like a fish. He did not remove his hat but it was pushed far enough back not to interfere. When her glasses got in his way, he took diem off of her and slipped them into his pocket.

The girl at first did not return any of die kisses but presently she began to and after she had put several on his cheek, she reached his lips and remained there, kissing him again and again as if she were trying to draw all die breath out of him. His breadi was clear and sweet like a child's and the kisses were sticky like a child's. He mumbled about loving her and about knowing when he first seen her that he loved her, but the mumbling was like the sleepy fretting of a child being put to sleep by his modier. Her mind, throughout this, never stopped or lost itself for a second to her feelings. "You ain't said you loved me none," he whispered finally, pulling back from her. "You got to say diat."

She looked away from him off into the hollow sky and tiien down at a black ridge and dien down fartiier into what appeared to be **two** green swelling lakes. She didn't realize he had taken her glasses **but** this landscape could not seem exceptional to her for she seldom paid any close attention to her surroundings.

"You got to say it," he repeated. "You got to say you love me."

She was always careful how she committed herself. "In a sense," •**he** began, "if you use die word loosely, you might say diat. But it's **not** a word I use. I don't have illusions. I'm one of those people who **tec** *through* to notliing."

The boy was frowning. "You got to say it. I said it and you got **to lay** it," he said.

The girl looked at him almost tenderly. "You poor baby," she murmured. "It's just as well you don't understand," and she pulled him by die neck, face-down, against her. "We are all damned," she said, "but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation."

The boy's astonished eyes looked blankly through die ends of her hair. "Okay," he almost whined, "but do you love me or don'tcher?"

"Yes," she said and added, "in a sense. But I must tell you something. There mustn't be anything dishonest between us." She lifted his head and looked him in the eye. "I am thirty years old," she said. "I have a number of degrees."

The boy's look was irritated but dogged. "I don't care," he said. "I don't care a thing about what all you done. I just want to know if you love me or don'tcher?" and he caught her to him and wildly planted her face with kisses until she said, "Yes, yes."

"Okay then," he said, letting her go. "Prove it."

She smiled, looking dreamily out on die shifty landscape. She had seduced him without even making up her mind to try. "How?" she asked, feeling that he should be delayed a little.

He leaned over and put his lips to her ear. "Show me where your wooden leg joins on," he whispered.

The girl uttered a sharp little cry and her face instantly drained of color. The obscenity of die suggestion was not what shocked her. As a child she had sometimes been subject to feelings of shame but education had removed the last traces of that as a good surgeon scrapes for cancer; she would no more have felt it over what he was asking dian she would have believed in his Bible. But she was as sensitive about die artificial leg as a peacock about his tail. No one ever touched it but her. She took care of it as someone else would his soul, in private and almost widi her own eyes turned away. "No," she said.

"I known it," he muttered, sitting up. "You're just playing me for a sucker." "Oh no no!" she cried. "It joins on at die knee. Only at die knee. Why do you want to see it?" The boy gave her a long penetrating look. "Because," he said, "it's what makes you different. You ain't like anybody else." She sat staring at him. There was nothing about her face or her

round freezing-blue eyes to indicate that this had moved her; but she felt as if her heart had stopped and left her mind to pump her blood. She decided that for the first time in her life she was face to face with real innocence. This boy, widi an instinct that came from beyond wisdom, had touched die truth about her. When after a minute, she said in a hoarse high voice, "All right," it was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his.

Very gently he began to roll die slack leg up. The artificial limb, in a white sock and brown flat shoe, was bound in a heavy material like canvas and ended in an ugly jointure where it was attached to die stump. The boy's face and his voice were entirely reverent as he uncovered it and said, "Now show me how to

take it off and on."

She took it off for him and put it back on again and then he took it off himself, handling it as tenderly as if it were a real one. "Seel" he said with a delighted child's face. "Now I can do it myself I"

"Put it back on," she said. She was thinking diat she would run away widi him and diat every night he would take the leg off and every morning put it back on again. "Put it back on," she said.

"Not yet," he murmured, setting it on its foot out of her reach. "Leave it off for a while. You got me instead."

She gave a little cry of alarm but he pushed her down and began to kiss her again. Widiout the leg she felt entirely dependent on him. Her brain seemed to have stopped thinking altogether and to be about some odier function that it was not very good at. Different expressions raced back and forth over her face. Every now and dien the boy, his eyes like two steel spikes, would glance behind him where the leg stood. Finally she pushed him off and said, "Put it back on me now."

"Wait," he said. He leaned the other way and pulled the valise toward him and opened it. It had a pale blue spotted lining and diere were only two Bibles in it. He took one of diese out and opened die cover of it. It was hollow and contained a pocket flask of whiskey, a pack of cards, and a small blue box widi printing on it. He laid diese out in front of her one at a time in an evenly-spaced row, like one presenting offerings at die shrine of a goddess. He put die blue box in her hand. THIS PRODUCT TO BE USED ONLY FOR THE PREVENTION OF DISEASE, she read, and dropped it. The boy was unscrewing the top of the flask. He stopped and pointed, with a smile, to the deck of cards. It was not an ordinary deck but one with an obscene picture on the back of each card. "Take a swig," he said, offering her the bottle first. He held it in front of her, but like one mesmerized, she did not move.

Her voice when she spoke had an almost pleading sound. "Aren't you," she murmured, "aren't you just good country people?"

The boy cocked his head. He looked as if he were just beginning to understand that she might be trying to insult him. "Yeah," he said, curling his lip slightly, "but it ain't held me back none. I'm as good as you any day in the week."

"Give me my leg," she said.

He pushed it farther away with his foot. "Come on now, let's begin to have us a good time," he said coaxingly. "We ain't got to know one another good yet."

"Give me my leg I" she screamed and tried to lunge for it but he pushed her down easily.

"What's the matter with you all of a sudden?" he asked, frowning as he screwed the top on the flask and put it quickly back inside the Bible. "You just a while ago said you didn't believe in nothing. I thought you was some girl!"

Her face was almost purple. "You're a Christian I" she hissed. "You're a fine Christian I You're just like them all—say one thing and do another. You're a perfect Christian, you're . . ."

The boy's mouth was set angrily. "I hope you don't think," he said in a lofty indignant tone, "that I believe in that crap! I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn't born yesterday and I know where I'm going!"

"Give me my leg!" she screeched. He jumped up so quickly that she barely saw him sweep the cards and the blue box into the Bible and throw the Bible into the valise. She saw him grab the leg and then she saw it for an instant slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase with a Bible at either side of its opposite ends. He slammed the lid shut and snatched up the valise and swung it down the hole and then stepped through himself.

When all of him had passed but his head, he turned and regarded **her** with a look that no longer had any admiration in it. "I've gotten a lot of interesting things," he said. "One time I got a woman's **glass** eye this way. And you needn't to think you'll catch me because Pointer ain't really my name. I use a different name at every house I **call** at and don't stay nowhere long. And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga," he said, using the name as if he didn't think much of it, "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since 1 was born I" and then the toast-colored hat disappeared down the hole and the girl was left, sitting on the straw in the dusty sunlight. When she turned her churning face toward the opening, she saw his blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake.

Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman, who were in the back pasture, digging up onions, saw him emerge a little later from the woods and head across the meadow toward the highway. "Why, that looks **like** that nice dull young man that tried to sell me a Bible yesterday," Mrs. Hopewell said, squinting. "He must have been selling **them** to the Negroes back in there. He was so simple," he said, "but I guess the world would be better off if we were all that simple."

Mrs. Freeman's gaze drove forward and just touched him before he disappeared under the hill. Then she returned her attention to the evil-smelling onion shoot she was lifting from the ground. "Some **can't** be that simple," she said. "1 know I never could."

You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead

FRANCIS MARION TARWATER'S uncle had been dead for only half a day when the boy got too drunk to finish digging his grave and a Negro named Buford Munson, who had come to get a jug filled, had to finish it and drag die body from the breakfast tabic where it was still sitting and bury it in a decent and Christian way, widi die sign of its Saviour at the head of the grave and enough dirt on top to keep the dogs from digging it up. Buford had come along about noon, and when he left at sundown, the boy, Tarwater, had never returned from the still. The old man had been Tarwater's great uncle, or said he was, and they had always lived together so far as the child knew. His uncle had said he was seventy years of age at die time he had rescued him and undertaken to bring him up; he was eighty-four when he died. Tarwater figured this made his own age fourteen. His uncle had taught him figures, reading, writing, and history beginning with Adam expelled from die Garden and going on down through **the** presidents to Herbert Hoover and on in speculation toward **the** Second Coming and the Day of Judgment. Besides giving him a good education, he had rescued him from his only other connection, old Tarwater's nephew, a school teacher who had no child of his own at die time and wanted this one of his dead sister's to raise according to his own ideas. The old man was in a position to know **what** his ideas were. He had lived for three mondis in die nephew's house on what **he** had thought at die time was Charity but what he said he had found out was not Charity or anything like it. All die time he had **lived** there, the nephew had secretly been making a study of him. The nephew, who had taken him in under the name of Charity, had at **the** same time been creeping into his soul by the back door, asking him questions that meant more than one thing, planting traps around die house and watching him fall into diem, and finally coming up with a written study of him for a school teacher magazine. The stench of his behavior had reached heaven and the Lord Himself had rescued die old man. He had sent him a rage of vision, had told him to fly with the orphan boy to the farthest part of die backwoods and raise him up to justify his Redemption. The Lord had assured him a long life and he had snatched die child from under the school teacher's nose and taken him to live in a clearing that he had title to for his lifetime.

Eventually Rayber, the school teacher, had discovered where diey were and had come out to the clearing to get die boy back. He had had to leave his car on die dirt road and walk a mile dirough the woods, on a padi diat appeared and disappeared, before he came to **the** corn patch with the gaunt two-story shack standing in the middle of it. The old man had been fond of recalling for Tarwater

die red, sweating, bitten face of his nephew bobbing up and down through **die** corn and behind it the pink, flowered hat of a welfare woman he had brought along with him. The corn was planted up to two **feet** from die porch step, and as the nephew came out of it, die old man appeared in die door widi his shotgun and said that he would shoot any foot that touched his step, and die two stood facing each **other** while die welfare woman bristled out of die corn like a peahen **upset** on the nest. The old man said if it hadn't been for die welfare **woman** his nephew wouldn't have taken a step, but she stood diere waiting, pushing back the wisps of dyed red hair that were plastered OQ **her** long forehead. Bodi dieir faces were scratched and bleeding **from** diorn bushes, and die old man recalled a switch of blackberry **bush** hanging from die sleeve of die welfare woman's blouse. She **only** had to let out her breath slowly as if she were releasing the last **patience** on eardi and die nephew lifted his foot and set it down on **the** step and the old man shot him in die leg. The two of diem had **scuttled** off, making a disappearing rattle in the corn, and the woman **had** screamed, "You knew he was crazy I"; but when they came out of die corn on the other side, old Tarwater had noted from the upstairs window where he had run that she had her arm around him and was holding him up while he hopped into die woods; and later he learned that he had married her diough she was twice his age and he could only possibly get one child out of her. She had never let him come back again.

The morning the old man died, he came down and cooked die breakfast as usual and died before he got the first spoonful to his moudi. The downstairs of their shack was all kitchen, large and dark, widi a wood stove in the center of it and a board table drawn up to the stove. Sacks of feed and mash were stacked in the corners, and scrap metal, wood shavings, old rope, ladders, and other tinder were wherever he or Tarwater had let diem fall. They had slept in the kitchen until a wild cat sprang in the window one night and frightened him into carrying die bed upstairs where diere were two empty rooms. He prophesied at die time that die stairsteps would take ten years off his life. At die moment of his deadi, he had sat down to his breakfast and lifted his knife in one square red hand halfway to his mouth and dien, widi a look of complete astonishment, he had lowered it until the hand rested on die edge of die plate and tilted it up off the table.

He was a bull-like old man with a short head set directly into his shoulders and silver protruding eyes that looked like two fish strain ing to get out of a net of red direads. He had on a putty-colored hat widi the brim turned up all around and over his undershirt a gray

coat that had once been black. Tarwater, sitting across die table from him, saw red ropes appear in his face and a tremor pass over him. It was like the tremor of a quake diat had begun at his heart and run outward and was just reaching die surface. His moudi twisted down sharply on one side and he remained exactly as he was, perfectly balanced, his back a good six inches from the chair back and his stomach caught just under die edge of die table. His eyes, dead silver, were focused on die boy across from him.

Tarwater felt the tremor transfer itself and run lightly over him. He knew the old man was dead widiout touching him and he con tinued to sit across die table from the corpse, finishing his breakfast in a kind of sullen embarrassment, as if he were in die presence of a new personality and couldn't think of anything to say. Finally he said in a querulous tone, "Just hold your horses. I already told you I would do it right." The voice sounded like a stranger's voice, as if the death had changed him instead of the old man.

He got up and took his plate out the back door and set it down on the bottom step, and two long-legged black game roosters tore across the yard and finished what was on it. He sat down on a long pine box on the back porch, and his hands began absently to unravel a length of rope, while his long cross-shaped face stared ahead beyond the clearing over woods that ran in gray and purple folds until they touched the light-blue fortress line of trees set against the empty morning sky.

The clearing was not simply off the dirt road but off the wagon track and footpath, and the nearest neighbors, colored not white, still had to walk through the woods, pushing plum branches out of their way to get to it. The old man had started an acre of cotton to die left and had run it beyond the fence line almost up to die house on one side. The two strands of barbed wire ran through die middle of die patch. A line of fog, hump-shaped, was creeping toward it, ready like a white hound dog to crouch under and crawl across the yard.

"I'm going to move that fence," Tarwater said. "I ain't going to have *my* fence in the middle of a field." The voice was loud and still strange and disagreeable and he finished the rest of his thought in his head: because this place is mine now whether I own it or not because I'm here and nobody can't get me off. If any

school teacher comes here to claim the property, I'll kill him.

He had on a faded pair of overalls and a gray hat pulled down over his ears like a cap. He followed his uncle's custom of never taking off his hat except in bed. He had always followed his uncle's customs up to diis date but: if I want to move diat fence before I bury him, diere wouldn't be a soul to hinder me, he thought; no voice will be lifted.

"Bury him first and get it over with," die loud stranger's disagreeable voice said, and he got up and went to look for die shovel. The pine box he had been sitting on was his uncle's coffin but he didn't intend to use it. The old man was too heavy for a thin boy

to hoist over the side of a box, and though old Tarwater had built it himself a few years before, he had said that if it wasn't feasible to get him into it when the time came, then just to put him in the hole as he was, only to be sure the hole was deep. He wanted it ten foot, he said, not just eight. He had worked on die box a long time, and when he finished it he had scratched on die top, MASON TARWATER, WITH GOD, and had climbed into it where it stood on the back porch and had lain there for some time, nodiing showing but his stomach which rose over die top like overleavened bread. The boy had stood at die side of die box, studying him. "This is die end of us all," die old man said with satisfaction, his gravel voice hearty in die coffin.

"It's too much of you for die box," Tarwater said. "I'll have to sit on die lid or wait until you rot a little."

"Don't wait," old Tarwater had said. "Listen. If it ain't feasible to use die box when die time comes, if you can't lift it or whatever, just get me in the hole, but I want it deep. I want it ten foot, not just eight—ten. You can roll me to it if notiung else. I'll roll. Get two boards and set them down die steps and start me rolling and dig where I stop and don't let me roll over into it until it's deep enough. Prop me widi some bricks so I won't roll into it and don't let die dogs nudge me over die edge before it's finished. You better pen up die dogs," he said.

"What if you die in bed?" die boy asked. "How'm I going to get you down die stairs?"

"I ain't going to die in bed," die old man said. "As soon as I hear die summons, I'm going to run downstairs. I'll get as close to die door as I can. If I should get stuck up diere, you'll have to roll me down die stairs, diat's all."

"My Lord," die child said.

The old man sat up in die box and brought his fist down on die edge of it. "Listen," he said. "I never asked much of you. I taken you and raised you and saved you from diat ass in town and now all I'm asking in return is when I die to

get me in die ground where die dead belong and set up a cross over me to show I'm diere. That'* all in die world I'm asking you to do."

"I'll be doing good if I get you in die ground," Tarwater said.
"I'll be too wore out set up any cross. I ain't bothering with trifles."

"TriflesI" his uncle hissed. "You'll learn what a trifle is on the day those crosses are gathered I Burying the dead right may be the only honor you ever do yourself. I brought you out here to raise you a Christian," he hollered, "and I'm damned if you won't be one!"

"If I don't have the strength to do it," die child said, watching him widi a careful detachment, "I'll notify my uncle in town and he can come out and take care of you. The school teacher," he drawled, observing diat the pockmarks in his uncle's face had already turned pale against die purple, "he'll 'tend to you."

The threads that restrained the old man's eyes diickened. He gripped both sides of die coffin and pushed forward as if he were going to drive it off die porch. "He'd burn me," he said hoarsely. "He'd have me cremated in an oven and scatter my ashes. 'Uncle,' he said to me, 'you're a type diat's almost extinct!' He'd be willing to pay the undertaker to burn me to be able to scatter my ashes," he said. "He don't believe in die Resurrection. He don't believe in the Last Day. He don't believe in . . ."

"The dead don't bodier with particulars," the boy interrupted.

The old man grabbed die front of his overalls and pulled him up against the side of die box so that their faces were not two inches apart. "The world was made for die dead. Think of all the dead diere are," he said and dien, as if he had conceived die answer for all insolence, he said, "There's a million times more dead than living and die dead are dead a million times longer dian the living are alive!" and he released him with a laugh.

The boy had shown only by a slight quiver in the eyes that he was shaken by diis, and after a minute he had said, "The school teacher is my uncle. The only blood connection I'll have and a living man and if I wanted to go to him, I'd go, now."

The old man looked at him silently for what seemed a full minute. Then he slammed his hands on the sides of die box and roared, "Whom die plague beckons, to die plague! Whom the sword, to the sword! Whom fire, to fire!" and die child trembled visibly.

A living man, he diought as he went to get die shovel, but he better not come out here and try to get me off diis property because I'll kill him. Go to him and be dammed, his uncle had said. I've saved you from him this far and if you go to him the minute I'm in the ground, there's nothing I can do about it.

The shovel lay against the side of the hen house. "I'll never set my foot in the

city again," Tarwater said. "I'll never go to him. Him nor nobody else will ever get me off this place." He decided to dig die grave under the fig tree because the old man would be good for die figs. The ground was sandy on top and solid brick underneatii and the shovel made a clanging sound when he struck it in die sand. Two hundred pounds of dead mountain to bury, he thought, and stood with one foot on the shovel, leaning forward, studying die white sky through the leaves of the tree. It would take all day to get a hole big enough out of this rock and the school teacher would burn him in a minute.

Tarwater had never seen the school teacher but he had seen his child, a boy who resembled old Tarwater himself. The old man had been so shocked by the likeness that the time he and Tarwater had gone there, he had only stood in die door, staring at the little boy and rolling his tongue around outside his mouth like an old idiot, That had been die first and only time the old man had seen die boy. "Three months there," he would say. "It shames me. Betrayed for three months in the house of my own kin, and if when I'm dead you want to turn me over to my betrayer and see my body burned, go ahead. Go ahead, boy!" he had shouted, sitting up splotch-faced in his box. "Go ahead and let him burn me but watch out for the crab that begins to grip your neck after that!" and he had clawed his hand in the air to show Tarwater his grip. "I been leavened by the yeast he don't believe in," he said, "and I won't be burned. And when I'm gone you'll be better off in these woods by yourself widi just as much light as that dwarf sun wants to let in than you would be in the city with him!"

The white fog had eased through the yard and disappeared into die next bottom and now the air was clear and blank. "The dead are poor," Tarwater said in the voice of die stranger. "You can't be any poorer than dead. He'll have to take what he gets." Nobody to bother me, he thought. Ever. No hand uplifted to hinder me from anydiing. A sand-colored hound beat its tail on the ground nearby and a few black chickens scratched in the raw clay he was turning up. The sun had slipped over the blue line of trees and, circled by a haze of yellow, was moving slowly across the sky. "Now I can do anything I want to," he said, softening the stranger's voice so that he could stand it. Could kill off all those chickens if I had a mind to, he thought, watching the worthless black game bantams that his uncle had been fond of keeping.

"He favored a lot of foolishness," the stranger said. "The truth is he was childish. Why, that school teacher never did him any harm. You take, all he did was to watch him and write down what he seen and heard and put it in a paper for school teachers to read. Now what was wrong in that? Why nothing. Who

cares what a school teacher reads? And the old fool acted like he had been killed in his very soul. Well, he wasn't so near dead then as he thought he was. Lived on fifteen years and raised up a boy to bury him, suitable to his own taste."

As Tarwater slashed at die ground with the shovel, the stranger's voice took on a kind of restrained fury and he kept repeating, "You got to bury him whole and completely by hand and that school teacher would burn him in a minute." After he had dug for an hour or more, die grave was only a foot deep, not as deep yet as the corpse. He sat down on the edge of it for a while. The sun was like a furious white blister in tlie sky. "The dead are a heap more trouble than the living," the stranger said. "That school teacher wouldn't consider for a minute tfiat on the last day all the bodies marked by crosses will be gathered. In die rest of the world diey do things different than what you been taught."

"I been there oncet," Tarwater muttered. "Nobody has to tell me."

His uncle two or three years before had gone there to call on tiie lawyers to try and get the property unentailed so that it would skip the school teacher and go to Tarwater. Tarwater had sat at the lawyer's twelfth-story window and looked down into die pit of the city street while his uncle transacted die business. On tiie way from die railroad station he had walked tall in die mass of moving metal and concrete speckled widi die very small eyes of people. The glitter of his own eyes was shaded under die stiff rooflike brim of a new gray hat balanced perfectly straight on his buttressing ears. Before coining he had read facts in the almanac and he knew that there were 60,000 people here who were seeing him for the first time. He wanted to stop and shake hands with each of them and say his name was Francis M. Tarwater and that he was here only for the day to accompany his uncle on business at a lawyer's. His head jerked backwards after each passing figure until they began to pass too thickly and he observed that their eyes didn't grab at you like the eyes of country people. Several of them bumped into him and this contact that should have made an acquaintance for life made nothing because the hulks shoved on with ducked heads and muttered apologies that he would have accepted if they had waited. At the lawyer's window, he had knelt down and let his face hang out upside-down over the floating speckled street moving like a river of tin below and had watched the glints on it from the sun which drifted pale in a pale sky. You have to do something particular here to make them look at you, he thought. They ain't going to look at you just because God made you. When I come for good, he said to himself, **I'll** do something to make every eye stick on me for what I done; and leaning forward, he saw his hat drop down gently, lost and casual, dallied slightly by the breeze on its way to be smashed in the traffic below. He clutched at his bare head and fell back inside the room.

His uncle was in argument with the lawyer, both hitting the desk that separated them, bending their knees and hitting their fists at the same time. The lawyer, a tall dome-headed man with an eagle's nose, kept repeating in a restrained shriek, "But I didn't make the will. I didn't make the law," and his uncle's voice grated, "I can't help it. My daddy wouldn't have wanted it this way. It has to skip him. My daddy wouldn't have seen a fool inherit his property. That's not how he intended it."

"My hat is gone," Tarwater said.

The lawyer threw himself backwards into his chair and screaked it toward Tarwater and saw him without interest from pale-blue eyes and screaked it forward again and said to his uncle, **"There'i** nothing I can do. You're wasting your time and mine. You might as well resign yourself to this will."

"Listen," old Tarwater said, "at one time I thought I was finished, old and sick and about to die and no money, nothing, and I accepted his hospitality because he was my closest blood connection **and** you could have called it his duty to take me, only I thought it was Charity, I thought . . ."

"I can't help what you thought or did or what your connection thought or did," the lawyer said and closed his eyes.

"My hat fell," Tarwater said.

"I'm only a lawyer," the lawyer said, letting his glance rove over the lines of clay-colored books of law that fortressed his office. "A car is liable to have run over it by now." "Listen," his uncle said, "all die time he was studying me for a paper he was writing. Only had me there to study me for this paper. Taking secret tests on me, his own kin, looking into my soul like a Peeping Tom, and then says to me, 'Uncle, you're a type that's almost extinct!' Almost extinct!" the old man piped, barely able to force a thread of sound from his throat. "You see how extinct I am!"

The lawyer shut his eyes and smiled into one cheek.

"Otiier lawyers," the old man growled, and they had left and visited three more without stopping, and Tarwater had counted **eleven** men who might have had on his hat or might not. Finally **when** they came out of the fourth lawyer's office, they sat down on **the** window ledge of a bank building and his uncle felt in his pocket **for** some biscuits he had brought and handed one to Tarwater. The **old** man unbuttoned his coat and allowed his stomach to ease forward and rest on his lap while he ate. His face worked wrathfully; **the** skin between the pockmarks grew pink and then purple and **then** white and the pockmarks appeared to jump from one spot to **another.** Tarwater was very pale and his eyes glittered with a peculiar **hollow** depth. He had an old work handkerchief tied

around his **head,** knotted at die four corners. He didn't observe die passing **people** who observed him now. "Thank God, we're finished here and **can** go home," he muttered.

"We ain't finished here," the old man said and got up abruptly and **started** down the street.

"My Jesus," the boy hissed, jumping to catch up with him. "Can't we sit down for one minute? Ain't you got any sense? They all tell **you** the same thing. It's only one law and it's nothing you can do **about** it. **I** got sense enough to get that; why ain't you? What's the **matter** with you?"

The old man strode on with his head thrust forward as if he were smelling out an enemy.

"Where we going?" Tarwater asked after they had walked out of the business streets and were passing between rows of gray bulbous houses with sooty porches that overhung the sidewalks. "Listen," he said, hitting his uncle's hip, "I never ast to come."

"You would have asked to come soon enough," the old man muttered. "Get your fill now." "I never ast for no fill. I never ast to come at all. I'm here before I knew this here was here."

"Just remember," the old man said, "just remember that I told you to remember when you ast to come that you never liked it when you were here," and they kept on going, crossing one length of sidewalk after another, row after row of overhanging houses with half-open doors that let a little dried light fall on the stained passageways inside. Finally they came out into another section where the houses were squat and almost identical and each one had a square of grass in front of it like a dog gripping a stolen steak. After a few blocks, Tarwater dropped down on the sidewalk and said, "I ain't going a step further."

"I don't even know where I'm going and I ain't going no further!" he shouted at his uncle's heavy figure which didn't stop or look bade In a second he jumped up and followed him again, thinking: If anything happened to him, I would be lost here.

The old man kept straining forward as if his blood scent were leading him closer and closer to- the place where his enemy was hiding. He suddenly turned up die short walk of a pale-yellow house and moved rigidly to tlie white door, his heavy shoulders hunched as if he were going to crash through like a bulldozer. He struck die wood with his fist, ignoring a polished brass knocker. By die time Tarwater came up behind him, die door had opened and a

small pink-faced fat boy stood in it. He was a white-haired chilli and wore steel-rimmed spectacles and had pale-silver eyes like the old man's. The two stood staring at each odier, old Tarwater with his fist raised and his mouth open and his tongue lolling idiotically from side to side. For a second die litde fat boy seemed shocked still widi astonishment. Then he guffawed. He raised his fist and opened his mouth and let his tongue roll out as far as it would go. The old man's eyes seemed about to strain out of tiieir sockets.

"Tell your father," he roared, "that I'm not extinct!"

The little boy shook as if a blast had hit him and pushed the door almost shut, hiding himself all but one spectacled eye. The old man **grabbed** Tarwater by die shoulder and swung him around and pushed him down the path away from the place.

He had never been back tliere again, never seen his cousin again, never seen the school teacher at all, and he hoped to God, he told **the** stranger digging the grave along with him now, that he would **never** see him, though he had nothing against him and he would dislike to kill him, but if he came out here, messing with what was none of his business except by law, tlien he would be obliged to.

"Listen," the stranger said, "what would he want to come out **here** for—where there's nothing?"

Tarwater began to dig again and didn't answer. He didn't search **out** die stranger's face, but he knew by now it was sharp and friendly **and** wise, shadowed under a stiff broad-brimmed hat. He had lost **his** dislike for die sound of tiie voice. Only, every now and tlien it **sounded** like a stranger's voice to him. He began to feel that he was **only** just now meeting himself, as if, as long as his uncle had lived, **he** had been deprived of his own acquaintance.

"I ain't denying die old man was a good one," his new friend said, **"but** like you said: you can't be any poorer than dead. They have to **take** what diey can get. His soul is off this mortal eartii now and his **body** is not going to feel die pinch—of fire or anytiiing else."

"It was tlie last day he was flunking of," Tarwater said.

"Well now," the stranger said, "don't you think any cross you set up in the year 1954 or 5 or 6 would be rotted out by die year the **Day** of Judgment comes in ? Rotted to as much dust as his ashes if **you** reduced him to ashes? And lemme ast you this: what's God **going** to do with sailors drowned at sea that the fish have et and the **fish** that et them et by other fish and they et by yet others? And **what** about people that get burned up naturally in house fires? **Burnt** up one way or another or lost in machines until they're a

pulp? And all these sojers blasted to nothing? What about all these **naturally** left without a piece to fit a piece?"

"If I burnt him," Tarwater said, "it wouldn't be natural, it would be deliberate."

"Oh, I see," the stranger said. "It ain't die Day of Judgment for him you're worried about, it's the Day of Judgment for you."

"That's my bidnis," Tarwater said.

"I ain't buttin into your bidnis," the stranger said. "It don't mean a thing to me. You're left by yourself in this empty place. Forever by yourself in die empty place widi just as much light as that dwarf sun wants to let in. You don't mean a thing to a soul as far as I **can** see."

"Redeemed," Tarwater muttered.

"Do you smoke?" the stranger asked.

"Smoke if I want to and don't if I don't," Tarwater said. "Bury if need be and don't if don't." "Go take a look at him and see if he's fell off his chair," his friend suggested.

Tarwater let die shovel drop in die grave and returned to the house. He opened the front door a crack and put his face to it. **Hii** uncle glared slightly to die side of him, like a judge intent upon some terrible evidence. The child shut die door quickly and went back to die grave. He was cold in spite of die sweat diat stuck **hii** shirt to his back.

The sun was directly overhead, apparently dead sail, holding ia breadi waiting out the noontime. The grave was about two feet **deep.** "Ten foot now, remember," die stranger said and laughed. "Old men are selfish. You got to expect die least from diem. The least from everybody," he added, and let out a flat sigh that was like a gust of sand raised and dropped suddenly by die wind.

Tarwater looked up and saw two figures cutting across the field, a colored man and woman, each dangling an empty vinegar jug by a finger. The woman, tall and Indian-like, had on a green sunhat. **She** stooped under die fence widiout pausing and came on across **the** yard toward the grave; the man held the wire down and swung **his** leg over and followed at her elbow. They kept dieir eyes on **the** hole and stopped at die edge of it, looking down into die raw ground widi shocked satisfied expressions. The man, Buford, had a crinkled, burnt-rag face, darker dian his hat. "Old man passed," he said.

The woman lifted her head and let out a slow sustained wail, piercing and formal. She set her jug down on the ground and crossed her arms and then lifted them in the air and wailed again.

"Tell her to shut up that," Tarwater said. "I'm in charge here now and I don't want

no nigger-mourning." "I seen his spirit for two nights," she said. "Seen him two nights and he was unrested."

"He ain't been dead but since this morning," Tarwater said. "If you all want your jugs filled, give diem to me and dig while I'm gone."

"He'd been perdicting his passing for many years," Buford said. "She seen him in her dream several nights and he wasn't rested. I known him well. I known him very well indeed."

"Poor sweet sugar boy," the woman said to Tarwater, "what you going to do here now by yourself in this lonesome place?"

"Mind by bidnis," the boy growled, jerking the jug out of her hand, and started off so quickly that he almost fell. He stalked across the back field toward die rim of trees diat surrounded tiie clearing.

The birds had gone into the deep woods to escape die noon sun and one dirush, hidden some distance ahead of him, called die same four notes again and again, stopping each time after diem to make a silence. Tarwater began to walk faster, dien he began to lope, and in a second he was running like somediing hunted, sliding down slopes waxed widi pine needles and grasping the limbs of trees to pull himself, panting, up die slippery inclines. He crashed dirough a wall of honeysuckle and leapt across a sandy stream bed diat was almost dry now and fell down against die high clay bank diat formed die back wall of a cove where die old man had kept his extra liquor hidden. He hid it in a hollow of die bank, covered widi a large stone. Tarwater began to fight at die stone to pull it away, while die stranger stood over his shoulder, panting, "He was crazy! He was crazy! That's die long and short of it. He was crazy!" Tarwater got die stone away and pulled out a black jug and sat down against die bank widi it. "Crazy!" die stranger hissed, collapsing by his side. The sun appeared, edging its way secretly behind die tops of the trees diat rose over die hiding place.

"A man, seventy years of age, to bring a baby out into the backwoods to raise him right I Suppose he had died when you were four years old? Could you have toted mash to tiie still then and supported yourself? I never heard of no four-year-old running a still.

"Never did I hear of that," he continued. "You weren't anything to him but something that would grow big enough to bury him when the time came, and now that he's dead, he's shut of you but you got two hundred pounds of him to carry below the face of the earth. And don't think he wouldn't heat up like a coal stove to see you take a drop of liquor," he added. "He might say it would hurt you but what he would mean was you might get so much you wouldn't be in no fit condition to bury him. He said he brought you out here to raise you according

to principle and that was the principle: that you should be fit when the time came to bury him so he would have a cross to mark where he was at.

"Well," he said in a softer tone, when the boy had taken a long swallow from the black jug, "a little won't interfere. Moderation never hurt no one."

A burning arm slid down Tarwater's throat as if the devil were already reaching inside him to finger his soul. He squinted at the angry sun creeping behind the topmost fringe of the trees.

"Take it easy," his friend said. "Do you remember them nigger gospel singers you saw one time, all drunk, all singing, all dancing around that black Ford automobile? Jesus, they wouldn't have been near so glad they were redeemed if they hadn't had that liquor in them. I wouldn't pay too much attention to my Redemption if I was you," he said. "Some people take everything too hard."

Tarwater drank more slowly. He had been drunk only one time before and that time his uncle had beat him with a board for it, saying liquor would dissolve a child's gut; another of his lies because his gut had not dissolved.

"It should be clear to you," his kind friend said, "how all your life you been tricked by that old man. You could have been a city slicker for the last ten years. Instead, you been deprived of any company but his, you been living in a two-story barn in the middle of this earth's bald patch, following behind a mule and plow since you were seven. And how do you know the education he give you is true to the fact? Maybe he taught you a system of figures nobody else uses? How do you know that two added to two makes four? Four added to four makes eight? Maybe other people don't use that system. How do you know if there was an Adam or if Jesus eased your situation any when He redeemed you? Or how you know if He actually done it? Nothing but that old man's word and it ought to be obvious to you by now that he was crazy. And as for Judgment Day," the stranger said, "every day is Judgment Day.

"Ain't you old enough to have learnt that yet for yourself? Don't everything you do, everything you have ever done, work itself out right or wrong before your eye and usually before the sun has set ? Have you ever got by with anything? No you ain't nor ever thought you would," he said. "You might as well drink all that liquor since you've already drunk so much. Once you pass the moderation mark you've passed it, and that gyration you feel working down from the top of your brain," he said, "that's the Hand of God laying a blessing on you. He has given you your release. That old man was the stone before your door and the Lord has rolled it away. He ain't rolled it quite far enough yet, of course. You got to finish up yourself but He's done the main part. Praise Him."

Tarwater had ceased to have any feeling in his legs. He dozed for a while, his head hanging to the side and his mouth open and the liquor trickling slowly

down the side of his overalls where the jug bad overturned in his lap. Eventually there was just a drip at the neck of the bottle, forming and filling and dropping, silent and measured and sun-colored. The bright, even sky began to fade, coarsening with clouds until every shadow had gone in. He woke with a wrench forward, his eyes focusing and unfocusing on something that looked like burnt rag hanging close to his face.

Buford said, "This ain't no way for you to act. Old man don't deserve this. There's no rest until the dead is buried." He was squatting on his heels, one hand gripped around Tarwater's arm. "I gone yonder to the door and seen him sitting there at the table, not even laid out on a cooling board. He ought to be laid out and have some salt on his bosom if you mean to keep him overnight."

The boy's lids pinched together to hold the image steady and in a second he made out the two small red blistered eyes. "He deserves to lie in a grave that fits him," Buford said. "He was deep in this life, he was deep in Jesus' misery."

"Nigger," the child said, working his strange swollen tongue, "take your hand off me."

Buford lifted his hand. "He needs to be rested," he said.

"He'll be rested all right when I get through with him," Tarwater said vaguely. "Go on and lea' me to my bidnis."

"Nobody going to bother you," Buford said, standing up. He waited a minute, bent, looking down at die limp figure sprawled against the bank. The boy's head was tilted backwards over a root that jutted out of the clay wall. His mouth hung open, and his hat, turned up in front, cut a straight line across his forehead, just over his half-open eyes. His cheekbones protruded, narrow and thin like the arms of a cross, and the hollows under them had an ancient look as if the child's skeleton beneath were as old as the world. "Nobody going to bother you," the Negro muttered, pushing through die wall of honeysuckle without looking back. "That going to be your trouble."

Tarwater closed his eyes again.

Some night bird complaining close by woke him up. It was not a screeching noise, only an intermittent *hump-hump* as if die bird had to recall his grievance each time before he repeated it. Clouds were moving convulsively across a black sky and diere was a pink unsteady moon that appeared to be jerked up a foot or so and then dropped and jerked up again. This was because, as he observed in an instant, the sky was lowering, coming down fast to smother him. The bird screeched and flew off in time and Tarwater lurched into the middle of the stream bed and crouched on his hands and knees. The moon was reflected like pale fire in die few spots of water in die sand. He sprang at die wall of honeysuckle and began to tear di rough it, confusing the sweet familiar odor with

the weight coming down on him. When he stood up on die other side, die black ground swung slowly and threw him down again. A flare of pink lightning lit the woods and he saw the black shapes of trees pierce out of die ground all around him. The night bird began to hump again from a thicket where he had settled.

Tarwater got up and started moving in the direction of die clearing, feeling his way from tree to tree, the trunks very cold and dry to his touch. There was distant thunder and a continuous flicker of pale lightning firing one section of woods and then another. Finally he saw tiie shack, standing gaunt-black and tall in die middle of the clearing, with the pink moon trembling directly over it. His eyes glittered like open pits of light as he moved across the sand, dragging his crushed shadow behind him. He didn't turn his head to that side of the yard where he had started the grave.

He stopped at the far back corner of the house and squatted down on the ground and looked underneath at the litter there, chicken crates and barrels and old rags and boxes. He had four matches in his pocket. He crawled under and began to set small fires, building one from another and working his way out at the front porch, leaving the fire behind him eating greedily at die dry tinder and the **floor** boards of the house. He crossed the front side of the clearing and went under the barbed-wire fence and through the rutted field without looking back until he reached the edge of the opposite woods. Then he glanced over his shoulder and saw that the pink moon had dropped through the roof of the shack and was bursting and he began to run, forced on through the woods by two bulging silver eyes that grew in immense astonishment in the center of the **fire** behind him.

Toward midnight he came out on the highway and caught a ride witli a salesman who was a manufacturer's representative selling copper flues throughout the Southeast and who gave the silent boy what he said was the best advice he could give any young fellow **setting** out to find himself a place in the world. While they sped forward on the black untwisting highway watched on either side by a dark wall of trees, the salesman said that it had been his personal experience that you couldn't sell a copper flue to a man you didn't **love.** He was a thin fellow with a narrow gorgelike face that **appeared** to have been worn down to the sharpest possible depressions. He wore a broad-brimmed stiff gray hat of the kind used by business **men** who would like to look like cowboys. He said love was the **only** policy that worked ninety-five per cent of the time. He said **when** he went to sell a man a flue, he asked first about that man's **wife's** health and how his children were. He said he had a book that he kept the names of his customer's families in and what was wrong with them. A man's wife had cancer,

he put her name down in the book and wrote *cancer* after it and inquired about her every time he went to that man's hardware store until she died; then he scratched her name out and wrote *dead* there "And 1 say thank God when they're dead," the salesman said, "that's one less to remember."

"You don't owe the dead anything," Tarwater said in a loud voice, speaking for almost the first time since he had got in the car. "Nor they you," said the stranger. "And that's the way it ought to be in this world—nobody owing nobody nothing."

"Look," Tarwater said suddenly, sitting forward, his face close to the windshield, "we're headed in die wrong direction. We're going back where we came from. There's die fire again. There's the fire we left." Ahead of them in die sky there was a faint glow, steady and not made by lightning. "That's the same fire we come froml" die boy said in a high wild voice.

"Boy, you must be nuts," die salesman said. "That's die city we're coming to. That's the glow from die city lights. I reckon this is your first trip anywhere."

You're turned around," the child said. "It's the same fire."

The stranger twisted his rutted face sharply. "I've never been turned around in my life," he said. "And I didn't come from any fire. I come from Mobile. And I know where I'm going. What's the matter widi you?"

Tarwater sat staring at die glow in front of him. "1 was asleep," he muttered. "I'm just now waking up." "Well you should have been listening to me," the salesman said. "I been telUng you things you ought to know."

Greenleaf

MRS. MAY'S bedroom window was low and faced on the east and the bull, silvered in the moonlight, stood under it, his head raised as if he listened—like some patient god come down to woo her—for a stir inside the room. The window was dark and the sound of her breadiing too light to be carried outside. Clouds crossing the moon blackened him and in die dark he began to tear at die hedge. Presently they passed and he appeared again in the same spot, chewing steadily, with a hedge-wreadi diat he had ripped loose for himself caught in the tips of his horns. When die moon drifted into retirement again, there was nothing to mark his place but die sound of steady chewing. Then abruptly a pink glow filled die window. Bars of light slid across him as the Venetian blind was slit. He took a step backward and lowered his head as if to show die wreadi across his horns. For almost a minute there was no sound from inside, then as he raised his crowned head again, a woman's voice, guttural as if addressed to a dog, said, "Get away from here, Sir!" and in a second muttered, "Some nigger's scrub bull." The animal pawed die ground and Mrs. May, standing bent forward behind die blind, closed it quickly lest die light make him charge into die shrubbery. For a second she waited, still bent forward, her nightgown hanging loosely from her narrow shoulders. Green rubber curlers sprouted neatly over her forehead and her face beneadi diem was smoodi as concrete widi an egg-white paste that drew die wrinkles out while she slept. She had been conscious in her sleep of a steady rhydimic chewing as if somediing were eating one wall of the house. She had been aware diat whatever it was had been eadng as long as she had

had the place and had eaten everything from the beginning of her fence line up to the house and now was eating die house and calmly with the same steady rhythm would continue through *the* house, eating her and the boys, and dien on, eating everything but the Greenleafs, on and on, eating everything until notliing was left but the Greenleafs on a little island all dieir own in the middle of what had been her place. When the munching reached her elbow, she jumped up and found herself, fully awake, standing in die middle of her room. She identified the sound at once: a cow was tearing at the shrubbery under her window. Mr. Greenleaf had left the lane gate open and she didn't doubt that die entire herd was on her lawn. She turned on the dim pink table lamp and dicn went to the window and slit die blind. The bull, gaunt and long-legged, was standing about

four feet from her, chewing calmly like an uncouth country suitor.

For fifteen years, she thought as she squinted at him fiercely, she had been having shiftless people's hogs root up her oats, their mules wallow on her lawn, dieir scrub bulls breed her cows. If tliis one was not put up now, he would be over the fence, ruining her herd before morning—and Mr. Greenleaf was soundly sleeping a half mile down die road in the tenant house. There was no way to get him unless she dressed and got in her car and rode down *that* and woke him up. He would come but his expression, his whole figure, his every pause, would say: "Hit looks to me like one or botli of them boys would not make their maw ride out in the middle of die night thisaway. If hit was my boys, they would have got thet bull up dieirself."

The bull lowered his head and shook it and tiie wreadi slipped down to the base of his horns where it looked like a menacing prickly crown. She had closed the blind then; in a few seconds she heard him move off heavily.

Mr. Greenleaf would say, "If hit was my boys they would never have allowed dieir maw to go after hired help in the middle of die night. They would have did it theirself."

Weighing it, she decided not to bodier Mr. Greenleaf. She re

turned to bed thinking diat if the Greenleaf boys had risen in die

world it was because she had given dieir fatiier employment when no one else would have him. She had had Mr. Greenleaf fifteen years but no one else would have had him five minutes. Just the way he approached an object was enough to tell anybody with eyes what kind-of a worker he was. He walked with a high-shouldered creep and he never appeared to come directly forward. He walked on the perimeter of some invisible circle and if you wanted to look him in the face, you had to move and get in front of him. She had not fired him because she had always doubted she could do better. He was too shiftless to go out and look for another job; he didn't have the initiative to steal, and after she had told him three or four times to do a thing, he did it; but he never told her about a sick cow until it was too late to call the veterinarian and if her barn had caught on fire, he would have called his wife to see the flames before he began to put them out. And of the wife, **she** didn't even like to think. Beside the wife, Mr. Greenleaf was an aristocrat.

"If it had been my boys," he would have said, "they would have **cut** off their right arm before they would have allowed their maw to "

"If your boys had any pride, Mr. Greenleaf," she would like to say to him some day, "diere are many things that they would not *allow* dieir modier to do."

The next morning as soon as Mr. Greenleaf came to the back **door,** she told

him there was a stray bull on the place and that she wanted him penned up at once.

"Done already been here diree days," he said, addressing his right **foot** which he held forward, turned slightly as if he were trying to **look** at die sole. He was standing at die bottom of die diree back **steps** while she leaned out the kitchen door, a small woman widi **pale** near-sighted eyes and gray hair diat rose on top like die crest **of** some disturbed bird.

"Three days!" she said in die restrained screech diat had become habitual widi her.

Mr. Greenleaf, looking into die distance over die near pasture, **removed** a package of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and let one **fall** into his hand. He put die package back and stood for a while looking at the cigarette. "I put him in the bull pen but he torn out of there," he said presently. "I didn't see him none after that." He bent over die cigarette and lit it and then turned his head briefly in her direction. The upper part of his face sloped gradually into the lower which was long and narrow, shaped like a rough chalice. He had deep-set fox-colored eyes shadowed under a gray felt hat diat he wore slanted forward following the line of his nose. His build was insignificant.

"Mr. Greenleaf," she said, "get that bull up this morning before you do anything else. You know he'll ruin the breeding schedule. Get him up and keep him up and the next time there's a stray bull on this place, tell me at once. Do you understand?"

"Where you want him put at?" Mr. Greenleaf asked.

"I don't care where you put him," she said. "You are supposed to have some sense. Put him where he can't get out. Whose bull is he?"

For a moment Mr. Greenleaf seemed to hesitate between silence and speech. He studied the air to the left of him. "He must be somebody's bull," he said after a while.

"Yes, he must I" she said and shut the door with a precise little slam.

She went into the dining room where the two boys were eating breakfast and sat down on the edge of her chair at the head of the table. She never ate breakfast but she sat with them to see that they had what they wanted. "HonestlyI" she said, and began to tell about the bull, aping Mr-. Greenleaf saying, "It must be *somebody's* bull."

Wesley continued to read the newspaper folded beside his plate but Scofield interrupted his eating from time to time to look at **her** and laugh. The two boys never had the same reaction to anything. They were as different, she said, as night and day. The only thing they did have in common was that neither of them cared **what** happened on the place. Scofield was a business type and Wesley **wai**

an intellectual.

Wesley, the younger child, had had rheumatic fever when he was seven and Mrs. May thought that this was what had caused him to be an intellectual. Scofield, who had never had a day's sickness in his life, was an insurance salesman. She would not have minded his selling insurance if he had sold a nicer kind but he sold die kind that only Negroes buy. He was what Negroes call a "policy man." He said there was more money in nigger-insurance than any other kind, and before company, he was very loud about it. He would shout, "Mamma don't like to hear me say it but I'm the best nigger-insurance salesman in this county I"

Scofield was thirty-six and he had a broad pleasant smiling face but he was not married. "Yes," Mrs. May would say, "and if you sold decent insurance, some *nice* girl would be willing to marry you. What nice girl wants to marry a nigger-insurance man? You'll wake up some day and it'll be too late."

And at diis Scofield would yodel and say, "Why Mamma, I'm not going to marry until you're dead and gone and then I'm going to marry me some nice fat farm girl that can take over this place!" And once he had added,"—some nice lady like Mrs. Greenleaf." When he had said this, Mrs. May had risen from her chair, her back stiff as a rake handle, and had gone to her room. There she had sat down on the edge of her bed for some time with her small face drawn. Finally she had whispered, "I work and slave, I struggle and sweat to keep this place for them and soon as I'm dead, they'll marry trash and bring it in here and ruin everything. They'll marry trash and ruin everything I've done," and she had made up her mind at that moment to change her will. The next day she had gone to her lawyer and had had the property entailed so that if they married, they could not leave it to their wives.

The idea that one of them might marry a woman even remotely like Mrs. Greenleaf was enough to make her ill. She had put up with Mr. Greenleaf for fifteen years, but the only way she had endured his wife had been by keeping entirely out of her sight. Mrs. Greenleaf was large and loose. The yard around her house looked like a dump and her five girls were always filthy; even the youngest one dipped snuff. Instead of making a garden or washing their clothes, her preoccupation was what she called "prayer healing.

Every day she cut all the morbid stories out of the newspaper—**the** accounts of women who had been raped and criminals who had escaped and children who had been burned and of train wrecks and plane crashes and the divorces of movie stars. She took these to the woods and dug a hole and buried diem and then she fell on the ground over them and mumbled and groaned for an hour or so moving her huge arms back and forth under her and out again and

finally just lying down flat and, Mrs. May suspected, going to sleep in die dirt.

She had not found out about this until the Greenleafs had been with her a few months. One morning she had been out to inspect a field that she had wanted planted in rye but diat had come up in clover because Mr. Greenleaf had used die wrong seeds in die grain drill. She was returning through a wooded padi diat separated two pastures, muttering to herself and hitdng the ground mediodically with a long stick she carried in case she saw a snake. "Mr. Greenleaf," she was saying in a low voice, "I cannot afford to pay for your mistakes. I am a poor woman and diis place is all I have. I have two boys to educate. I cannot . . . ."

Out of nowhere a guttural agonized voice groaned, "Jesus I Jesus I" In a second it came again widi a terrible urgency. "Jesus! Jesus!"

Mrs. May stopped still, one hand lifted to her diroat. The sound was so piercing that she felt as it some violent unleashed force had broken out of die ground and was charging toward her. Her second thought was more reasonable: somebody had been hurt on die place and would sue her for everything she had. She had no insurance. She rushed forward and turning a bend in the padi, she saw Mrs. Greenleaf sprawled on her- hands and knees off die side of the road, her head down.

"Mrs. Greenleaf!" she shrilled, "what's happened?"

Mrs. Greenleaf raised her head. Her face was a patchwork of dirt and tears and her small eyes, die color of two field peas, were red-rimmed and swollen, but her expression was as composed as a bull dog's. She swayed back and fordi on her hands and knees and groaned, "Jesus, Jesus."

Mrs. May winced. She diought the word, Jesus, should be kept inside die church building like other words inside die bedroom* She was a good Chrisdan woman widi a large respect for religion, diough she did not, of course, believe any of it was true. "What is the matter with you?" she asked sharply.

"You broken my healing," Mrs. Greenleaf said, waving her aside. "I can't talk to you until I finish."

Mrs. May stood, bent forward, her mouth open and her stick raised off the ground as if she were not sure what she wanted to strike with it.

"Oh Jesus, stab me in the heart!" Mrs. Greenleaf shrieked. "Jesus, stab me in the heart I" and she fell back flat in die dirt, a huge human mound, her legs and arms spread out as if she were trying to wrap them around the earth.

Mrs. May felt as furious and helpless as if she had been insulted by a child. "Jesus," she said, drawing herself back, "would be *ashamed* of you. He would tell you to get up from there diis instant and go wash your children's clothes I"

and she had turned and walked off as fast as she could.

Whenever she thought of how the Greenleaf boys had advanced in die world, she had only to think of Mrs. Greenleaf sprawled obscenely on the ground, and say to herself, "Well, no matter how far diey *go,* they *came* from that."

She would like to have been able to put in her will that when she died, Wesley and Scofield were not to continue to employ Mr. Greenleaf. She was capable of handling Mr. Greenleaf; they were not. Mr. Greenleaf had pointed out to her once that her boys didn't know hay from silage. She had pointed out to him diat tiiey had other talents, that Scofield was a successful business man and Wesley a successful intellectual. Mr. Greenleaf did not comment, but he never lost an opportunity of letting her see by his expression or some simple gesture, that he held the two of diem in infinite contempt. As scrub-human as the Greenleafs were, he never hesitated to let her know that in any like circumstance in which his own boys might have been involved, they—O. T. and E. T. Greenleaf—would have acted to better advantage.

The Greenleaf boys were two or diree years younger than die May boys. They were twins and you never knew when you spoke to one of tiiem whedier you were speaking to O.T. or E.T, and diey never had die politeness to enlighten you. They were long-legged and raw-boned and red-skinned, widi bright grasping fox-colored eyes like dieir fadier's. Mr. Greenleaf's pride in diem began widi die fact that diey were twins. He acted, Mrs. May said, as if this were something smart they had thought of themselves. They were energetic and hard-working and she would admit to anyone that they had come a long way—and diat die Second World War was responsible for it.

They had bodi joined the service and, disguised in their uniforms, diey could not be told from other people's children. You could tell, of course, when they opened their mouths but they did that seldom. The smartest diing they had done was to get sent overseas and there to marry French wives. They hadn't married French trash eidier. They had married nice girls who naturally couldn't tell that diey murdered the king's English or that the Greenleafs were who they were.

Wesley's heart condition had not permitted him to serve his country but Scofield had been in the army for two years. He had not cared for it and at the end of his military service, he was only a Private First Class. The Greenleaf boys were bodi some kind of sergeants, and Mr. Greenleaf, in those days, had never lost an opportunity of referring to them by their rank. They had both managed to get wounded and now they bodi had pensions. Furdier, as soon as they were released from the army, diey took advantage of all the benefits and went to the school of agriculture at die university—the taxpayers meanwhile supporting their French wives. The two of them were living now about two miles down die highway on a

piece of land that die government had helped diem to buy and in a brick duplex bungalow diat die government had helped to build and pay for. If die war had made anyone, Mrs. May said, it had made die Greenleaf boys. They each had three litde children apiece, who spoke Greenleaf English and French, and who, on account of dieir mothers' background, would be sent to die convent school and brought up widi manners. "And in twenty years," Mrs. May asked Scofield and Wesley, "do you know what diose people will be?

"Society," she said blackly.

She had spent fifteen years coping with Mr. Greenleaf and, by now, handling him had become second nature widi her. His disposition on any particular day was as much a factor in what she could and couldn't do as the weadier was, and she had learned to read his face the way real country people read the sunrise and sunset.

She was a country woman only by persuasion. The late Mr. May, a business man, had bought the place when land was down, and when he died it was all he had to leave her. The boys had not been happy to move to the country to a broken-down farm, but there was nothing else for her to do. She had the timber on the place cut and with the proceeds had set herself up in the dairy business after Mr. Greenleaf had answered her ad. "i seen yor add and i will come have 2 boys," was all his letter said, but he arrived the next day in a pieced-together truck, his wife and five daughters sitting on the floor in back, himself and the two boys in the cab.

Over the years they had been on her place, Mr. and Mrs. Greenleaf had aged hardly at all. They had no worries, no responsibilities. They lived like the lilies of the field, off the fat that she struggled to put into the land. When she was dead and gone from overwork and worry, the Greenleafs, healthy and thriving, would be just ready to begin draining Scofield and Wesley.

Wesley said the reason Mrs. Greenleaf had not aged was because she released all her emotions in prayer healing. "You ought to start praying, Sweetheart," he had said in the voice that, poor boy, he could not help making deliberately nasty.

Scofield only exasperated her beyond endurance but Wesley caused her real anxiety. He was thin and nervous and bald and being an intellectual was a terrible strain on his disposition. She doubted if he would marry until she died but she was certain that then the wrong woman would get him. Nice girls didn't like Scofield but Wesley didn't like nice girls. He didn't like anything. He drove twenty miles every day to the university where he taught and twenty miles back every night, but he said he hated the twenty-mile drive and he hated the second-rate university and he hated the morons who attended it. He hated the country

and he hated the life he lived; he hated living with his mother and his idiot brother and he hated hearing about the damn dairy and the damn help and **the** damn broken machinery. But in spite of all he said, he never **made** any move to leave. He talked about Paris and Rome but he **never** went even to Atlanta.

"You'd go to those places and you'd get sick," Mrs. May would say. "Who in Paris is going to see that you get a salt-free diet? And do you think if you married one of those odd numbers you take out that *she* would cook a salt-free diet for you? No indeed, she would not!" When she took this line, Wesley would turn himself roughly around in his chair and ignore her. Once when she had kept it up too long, he had snarled, "Well, why don't you do something practical, Woman ? Why don't you pray for me like Mrs. Greenleaf would?"

"I don't like to hear you boys make jokes about religion," she had said. "If you would go to church, you would meet some nice girls."

But it was impossible to tell them anything. When she looked at the two of them now, sitting on either side of the table, neither one caring the least if a stray bull ruined her herd—which was their herd, their future—when she looked at the two of them, one hunched over a paper and the other teetering back in his chair, grinning at her like an idiot, she wanted to jump up and beat her fist on the table and shout, "You'll find out one of these days, you'll find out what *Reality* is when it's too late!"

"Mamma," Scofield said, "don't you get excited now but I'll tell you whose bull that is." He was looking at her wickedly. He let his chair drop forward and he got up. Then with his shoulders bent and his hands held up to cover his head, he tiptoed to the door. He backed into the hall and pulled the door almost to so that it hid all of him but his face. "You want toJcnow, Sugarpie?" he asked.

Mrs. May sat looking at him coldly.

"That's O.T. and E.T.'s bull," he said. "I collected from their nigger yesterday and he told me they were missing it," and he showed her an exaggerated expanse of teeth and disappeared silently.

Wesley looked up and laughed.

Mrs. May turned her head forward again, her expression unaltered, "I am the only *adult* on this place," she said. She leaned across the table and pulled the paper from the side of his plate. "Do you see how it's going to be when I die and you boys have to handle him?" she began. "Do you see why he didn't know whose bull that was? Because it was theirs. Do you see what I have to put up with?
Do you see that if I hadn't kept my foot on his neck all these years, **you** boys might be milking cows every morning at four o'clock?"

Wesley pulled the paper back toward his plate and staring at her full in the face, he murmured, "I wouldn't milk a cow to save your **soul** from hell."

"I know you wouldn't," she said in a brittle voice. She sat back **and** began rapidly turning her knife over at the side of her plate. "O.T. and E.T. are fine boys," she said. "They ought to have been my sons." The diought of this was so horrible that her vision of Wesley was blurred at once by a wall of tears. All she saw was his **dark** shape, rising quickly from die table. "And you two," she cried, "you two should have belonged to that woman I"

He was heading for the door. "When I die," she said in a thin voice, "I don't know what's going to become of you." "You're always yapping about when-you-die," he growled as he rushed out, "but you look pretty healthy to me."

For some time she sat where she was, looking straight ahead through the window across the room into a scene of indistinct grays and greens. She stretched her face and her neck muscles and drew in a long breath but the scene in front of her flowed together anyway into a watery gray mass. "They needn't think I'm going to die any time soon," she muttered, and some more defiant voice in her added: I'll die when I get good and ready.

She wiped her eyes with the table napkin and got up and went to the window and gazed at the scene in front of her. The cows were grazing on two pale green pastures across the road and behind them, fencing them in, was a black wall of trees with a sharp sawtooth edge that held off the indifferent sky. The pastures were enough to calm her. When she looked out any window in her house, she saw tiie reflection of her own character. Her city friends said she was die most remarkable woman they knew, to go, practically penniless and with no experience, out to a rundown farm and make **a** success of it. "Everything is against you," she would say, "tiie weather is against you and the dirt is against you and the help is against you. They're all in league against you. There's nodung **for** it but an iron hand!"

"Look at Mamma's iron hand I" Scofield would yell and **grab** her arm and hold it up so that her delicate blue-veined little **hand** would dangle from her wrist like the head of a broken lily. **The** company always laughed.

The sun, moving over the black and white grazing cows, was just a little brighter than the rest of the sky. Looking down, she saw **a** darker shape that might have been its shadow cast at an angle, moving among them. She uttered a sharp cry and turned and marched **out** of the house.

Mr. Greenleaf was in the trench silo, filling a wheelbarrow. **She** stood on the

edge and looked down at him. "I told you to get up that bull. Now he's in with the milk herd."

"You can't do two thangs at oncet," Mr. Greenleaf remarked.

"I told you to do that first."

He wheeled the barrow out of the open end of the trench toward the barn and she followed close behind him. "And you needn't think, Mr. Greenleaf," she said, "that I don't know exactly **whose** bull that is or why you haven't been in any hurry to notify me **he** was here. I might as well feed O.T. and E.T.'s bull as long as I'm going to have him here ruining my herd."

Mr. Greenleaf paused with the wheelbarrow and looked **behind** him. "Is that them boys' bull?" he asked in an incredulous tone. She did not say a word. She merely looked away with her **moudi** taut. "They told me their bull was out but I never known that **was** him," he said.

"I want that bull put up now," she said, "and I'm going to **drive** over to O.T. and E.T.'s and tell them they'll have to come get **him** today. I ought to charge for the time he's been here—then **it** wouldn't happen again."

"They didn't pay but seventy-five dollars for him," Mr. Greenleaf offered.

"I wouldn't have had him as a gift," she said.

"They was just going to beef him," Mr. Greenleaf went on, **"but** he got loose and run his head into their pickup truck. He don't **like** cars and trucks. They had a time getting his horn out the **fender** and when they finally got him loose, he took off and they **was** too tired to run after him—but I never known that was him there."

"It wouldn't have paid you to know, Mr. Greenleaf," she said. "But you know now. Get a horse and get him."

In a half hour, from her front window she saw the bull, squirrel-Colored, with jutting hips and long light horns, ambling down the dirt road diat ran in front of die house. Mr. Greenleaf was behind him on the horse. "That's a Greenleaf bull if I ever saw one," she muttered. She went out on the porch and called, "Put him where he can't get out."

"He likes to bust loose," Mr. Greenleaf said, looking with approval at die bull's rump. "This gentleman is a sport." "If those boys don't come for him, he's going to be a dead sport," she said. "I'm just warning you."

He heard her but he didn't answer.

"That's the awfullest looking bull I ever saw," she called but he was too far down the road to hear.

It was mid-morning when she turned into O.T. and E.T.'s driveway. The house, a new red-brick, low-to-the-ground building that looked like a warehouse with windows, was on top of a treeless hill. The sun was beating down directly on the white roof of it. It was die kind of house diat everybody built now and nodiing marked it as belonging to Greenleafs except three dogs, part hound and part spitz, that rushed out from behind it as soon as she stopped her car. She reminded herself that you could always tell the class of people by the class of dog, and honked her horn. While she sat waiting for someone to come, she continued to study the house. All die windows were down and she wondered if the government could have air-conditioned die thing. No one came and she honked again. Presently a door opened and several children appeared in it and stood looking at her, making no move to come forward. She recognized this as a true Greenleaf trait—they could hang in a door, looking at you for hours.

"Can't one of you children come here?" she called.

After a minute they all began to move forward, slowly. They had on overalls and were barefooted but they were not as dirty as she might have expected. There were two or three diat looked distinctly like Greenleafs; the others not so much so. The smallest child was a girl with untidy black hair. They stopped about six feet from the automobile and stood looking at her.

"You're mighty pretty," Mrs. May said, addressing herself to the smallest girl.

There was no answer. They appeared to share one dispassionate

expression between them. "Where's your Mamma?" she asked. There was no answer to this for some time. Then one of them

said something in French. Mrs. May did not speak French. "Where's your daddy?" she asked. After a while, one of the boys said, "He ain't hyar

neither." "Ahhhh," May said as if something had been proven. "Where's the colored man?"

She waited and decided no one was going to answer. "The cat has six little tongues," she said. "How would you like to come home with me and let me teach you how to talk?" She laughed and **her** laugh died on the silent air. She felt as if she were on trial **for** her life, facing a jury of Greenleafs. **"I'll** go down and see if I can find the colored man," she said.

"You can go if you want to," one of the boys said. "Well, thank you," she murmured and drove off. The barn was down the lane from the house. She had not **seen**

it before but Mr. Greenleaf had described it in detail for it **had** been built according to the latest specifications. It was a milking parlor arrangement where the cows are milked from below. **The** milk ran in pipes from the machines to the

milk house and **was** never carried in no bucket, Mr. Greenleaf said, by no human **hand.** "When you gonter get you one?" he had asked.

"Mr. Greenleaf," she had said, "I have to do for myself. I am **not** assisted hand and foot by the government. It would cost me **$20,000** to install a milking parlor. I barely make ends meet as it is."

"My boys done it," Mr. Greenleaf had murmured, and **then—**

"but all boys ain't alike." "No indeed!" she had said. "I thank God for that!" "I thank Gawd for ever-thang," Mr. Greenleaf had drawled. You might as well, she had thought in the fierce silence **that**

followed; you've never done anything for yourself.

She stopped by the side of the barn and honked but no one appeared. For several minutes she sat in the car, observing the various machines parked around, wondering how many of them were paid **for.** They had a forage harvester and a rotary hay baler. She had those too. She decided that since no one was here, she would get out and have a look at the milking parlor and see if they kept it clean.

She opened the milking room door and btuck her head in and for the first second she felt as if she were going to lose her breath. The spotless white concrete room was filled with sunlight that came from a row of windows head-high along both walls. The metal stanchions gleamed ferociously and she had to squint to be able to look at all. She drew her head out the room quickly and closed the door and leaned against it, frowning. The light outside was not so bright but she was conscious that the sun was directly on top of her head, like a silver bullet ready to drop into her brain.

A Negro carrying a yellow calf-feed bucket appeared from around the corner of the machine shed and came toward her. He was a light yellow boy dressed in the cast-off army clothes of the Green-leaf twins. He stopped at a respectable distance and set the bucket pa the ground.

"Where's Mr. O.T. and Mr. E.T.?" she asked.

"Mist O.T. he in town, Mist E. T. he off yonder in the field," the Negro said, pointing first to the left and then to the right as as if he were naming the position of two planets.

"Can you remember a message?" she asked, looking as if she thought this doubtful. **"I'll** remember it if I don't forget it," he said with a touch of sullenness.

"Well, I'll write it down then," she said. She got in her car and **took** a stub of pencil from her pocket book and began to write on the **back** of an empty envelope. The Negro came and stood at the window. "I'm Mrs. May," she said as she wrote. "Their bull is on my place and I want him off *today.* You can tell them I'm furious about it."

"That bull lef here Sareday," tiie Negro said, "and none of us **ain't** seen him since. We ain't knowed where he was." "Well, you know now," she said, "and you can tell Mr. O.T. and

Mr. E.T. that if they don't come get him today, I'm going to have their daddy shoot him the first thing in the morning. I can't have dbat bull ruining my herd." She handed him die note.

"If I knows Mist O.T. and Mist E.T.," he said, taking it, "they goin to say you go ahead on and shoot him. He done busted up one of our trucks already and we be glad to see die last of him."

She pulled her head back and gave him a look from slighdy bleared eyes. "Do diey expect me to take my time and my worker to shoot their bull?" she asked. "They don't want him so diey just let him loose and expect somebody else to kill him? He's eating my oats and ruining my herd and I'm expected to shoot him too?"

"I speck you is," he said softly. "He done busted up . . ."

She gave him a very sharp look and said, "Well, I'm not surprised. That's just the way some people are," and after a second she asked, "Which is boss, Mr. O.T. or Mr. E.T.?" She had always suspected that they fought between themselves secretly.

"They never quads," the boy said. "They like one man in two skins."

"Hmp. I expect you just never heard them quarrel."

"Nor nobody else heard them neither," he said, looking away as if this insolence were addressed to someone else. "Well," she said, "I haven't put up widi dieir father for fifteen years not to know a few things about Greenleafs." The Negro looked at her suddenly with a gleam of recognition. "Is you my policy man's mother?"- he asked.

"I don't know who your policy man is," she said sharply. **"You** give them that note and tell diem if they don't come for diat **bull** today, they'll be making dieir fadier shoot it tomorrow," and **she** drove off.

She stayed at home all afternoon waiting for die Greenleaf twins to come for the bull. They did not come. I might as well be working for them, she thought furiously. They are simply going to use me to die limit. At the supper table, she went over it again for **tiie** boys' benefit because she wanted diem to see exactly what O.T. and E.T. would do. "They don't want diat bull," she said, "—pass the butter—so they simply turn him loose and let somebody **else** worry about getting rid of him for them. How do you like that? I'm the victim. I've always been the victim."

"Pass the butter to the victim," Wesley said. He was in a worse humor than

usual because he had had a flat tire on the way home from the university.

Scofield handed her the butter and said, "Why Mamma, ain't you ashamed to shoot an old bull that ain't done nothing but give you a little scrub strain in your herd? I declare," he said, "with the Mamma I got it's a wonder I turned out to be such a nice boy!"

"You ain't her boy, Son," Wesley said.

She eased back in her chair, her fingertips on the edge of the table.

"All I know is," Scofield said, "I done mighty well to be as nice as I am seeing what I come from."

When they teased her they spoke Greenleaf English but Wesley made his own particular tone come through it like a knife edge. "Well lemme tell you one thang, Brother," he said, leaning over the table, "that if you had half a mind you would already know."

"What's that, Brother?" Scofield asked, his broad face grinning into the thin constricted one across from him.

"That is," Wesley said, "that neither you nor me is her boy . . . ," but he stopped abruptly as she gave a kind of hoarse wheeze like an old horse lashed unexpectedly. She reared up and ran from the room.

"Oh, for God's sake," Wesley growled, "What did you start her off for?"

"I never started her off," Scofield said. "You started her off."

"Hah."

"She's not as young as she used to be and she can't take it."

"She can only give it out," Wesley said. "I'm the one that takes it."

His brother's pleasant face had changed so that an ugly family resemblance showed between them. "Nobody feels sorry for a lousy bastard like you," he said and grabbed across the table for the other's shirtfront.

From her room she heard a crash of dishes and she rushed back through the kitchen into the dining room. The hall door was open **and** Scofield was going out of it. Wesley was lying like a large bug on his back with die edge of die overturned table cutting him across the middle and broken dishes scattered on top of him. She pulled the table off him and caught his arm to help him rise but he scrambled up and pushed her off widi a furious charge of energy and flung himself out of the door after his brother.

She would have collapsed but a knock on die back door stiffened her and she swung around. Across die kitchen and back porch, she could see Mr. Greenleaf peering eagerly tiirough die screenwire. All her resources returned in full strength as if she had only needed to be challenged by the devil himself to regain them. "I heard a thump," he called, "and I diought the plastering might have fell

on you."

If he had been wanted someone would have had to go on a horse to find him. She crossed the kitchen and die porch and stood inside the screen and said, "No, nodiing happened but die table turned over. One of the legs was weak," and widiout pausing, "die boys didn't come for the bull so tomorrow you'll have to shoot him."

The sky was crossed widi thin red and purple bars and behind them die sun was moving down slowly as if it were descending a ladder. Mr. Greenleaf squatted down on die step, his back to her, die top of his hat on a level with her feet. "Tomorrow I'll drive him home for you," he said.

"Oh no, Mr. Greenleaf," she said in a mocking voice, "you drive him home tomorrow and next week he'll be back here. I know better dian diat." Then in a mournful -tone, she said, "I'm surprised at
O.T. and E.T. to treat me this way. I diought they'd have more gratitude. Those boys spent some mighty happy days on diis place, didn't they, Mr. Greenleaf?"

Mr. Greenleaf didn't say anydiing.

"I think diey did," she said. "I diink diey did. But diey've forgotten all die nice little things I did for diem now. If I recall, diey wore my boys' old clodies and played widi my boys' old toys and hunted widi my boys' old guns. They swam in my pond and shot my birds and fished in my stream and I never forgot dieir birtliday and Christmas seemed to roll around very often if I remember it right. And do diey diink of any of those tilings now?" she asked. "NOOOOO," she said.

For a few seconds she looked at die disappearing sun and Mr. Greenleaf examined die palms of his hands. Presently as if it had just occurred to her, she asked, "Do you know die real reason diey didn't come for diat bull?"

"Naw I don't," Mr. Greenleaf said in a surly voice.

"They didn't come because I'm a woman," she said. "You can get away with anything when you're dealing with a woman. If diere were a man running diis place . . ."

Quick as a snake striking Mr. Greenleaf said, "You got two boys. They know you got two men on the place."

The sun had disappeared behind die tree line. She looked down at die dark crafty face, upturned now, and at the wary eyes, bright under the shadow of the hatbrim. She waited long enough for him to see diat she was hurt and then she said, "Some people learn gratitude too late, Mr. Greenleaf, and some never learn it at all," and she turned and left him sitting on the steps.

Half die night in her sleep she heard a sound as if some large stone were grinding a hole on die outside wall of her brain. She was walking on die inside,

over a succession of beautiful rolling hills, planting her stick in front of each step. She became aware after a time diat the noise was the sun trying to burn tiirough the tree line and she stopped to watch, safe in the knowledge that it couldn't, diat it had to sink the way it always did outside of her property. When she first stopped it was a swollen red ball, but as she stood watching it began to narrow and pale until it looked like a bullet. Then suddenly it burst through the tree line and raced down die hill toward her. She woke up with her hand over her moudi and die same noise, diminished but distinct, in her ear. It was die bull munching under her window. Mr. Greenleaf had let him out.

She got up and made her way to die window in die dark and looked out tiirough die slit blind, but the bull had moved away from die hedge and at first she didn't see him. Then she saw a heavy form some distance away, paused as if observing her. This is die last nig'at I am going to put up widi this, she said, and watched until die iron shadow moved away in die darkness.

The next morning she waited until exactly eleven o'clock. Then she got in her car and drove to die barn. Mr. Greenleaf was cleaning milk cans. He had seven of them standing up outside the milk room to get the sun. She had been telling him to do this for two weeks. "All right, Mr. Greenleaf," she said, "go get your gun. We're going to shoot that bull."

"I thought you wanted theseyer cans . . ." "Go get your gun, Mr. Greenleaf," she said. Her voice and face were expressionless. "That gentleman torn out of there last night," he murmured in a tone of regret and bent again to the can he had his arm in.

"Go get your gun, Mr. Greenleaf," she said in the same triumphant toneless voice. "The bull is in the pasture with the dry cows. I saw him from my upstairs window. I'm going to drive you up to the field and you can run him into the empty pasture and shoot him there."

He detached himself from the can slowly. "Ain't nobody ever ast me to shoot my boys' own bull!" he said in a high rasping voice. He removed a rag from his back pocket and began to wipe his hands violently, then his nose.

She turned as if she had not heard this and said, "I'll wait for you in the car. Go get your gun."

She sat in the car and watched him stalk off toward the harness room where he kept a gun. After he had entered the room, there was a crash as if he had kicked something out of his way. Presently he emerged again with die gun, circled behind the car, opened die door violently and threw himself onto die seat beside her. He held the gun between his knees and looked straight ahead. He'd like

to shoot me instead of the bull, she thought, and turned her face away so that he could not see her smile.

The morning was dry and clear. She drove through the woods for a quarter of a mile and then out into the open where diere were fields on either side of the narrow road. The exhilaration of carrying her point had sharpened her senses. Birds were screaming everywhere, the grass was almost too bright to look at, the sky was an even piercing blue. "Spring is here!" she had gaily. Mr. Green leaf lifted one muscle somewhere near his mouth as if he found this the most asinine remark ever made. When she stopped at die second pasture gate, he flung himself out of the car door and slammed it behind him. Then he opened die gate and she drove dirough. He closed it and flung himself back in, silently, and she drove around the rim of the pasture until she spotted die bull, almost in tiie center of it, grazing peacefully among die cows.

"The gentleman is waiting on you," she said and gave Mr. Greenleaf's furious profile a sly look. "Run him into that next pasture and when you get him in, I'll drive in behind you and shut die gate myself."

He flung himself out again, this time deliberately leaving the car door open so diat she had to lean across the seat and close it. She sat smiling as she watched him make his way across the pasture toward die opposite gate. He seemed to dirow himself forward at each step and dien pull back as if he were calling on some power to witness diat he was being forced. "Well," she said aloud as if he were still in die car, "it's your own boys who are making you do this, Mr. Greenleaf." O.T. and E.T. were probably splitting dieir sides laughing at him now. She could hear dieir identical nasal voices saying, "Made Daddy shoot our bull for us. Daddy don't know no better dian to diink diat's a fine bull he's shooting. Gonna kill Daddy to shoot tiiat bull!"

"If those boys cared a thing about you, Mr. Greenleaf," she said, "diey would have come for diat bull. I'm surprised at diem."

He was circling around to open the gate first. The bull, dark among die spotted cows, had not moved. He kept his head down, eating constantly. Mr. Greenleaf opened die gate and dien began circling back to approach him from the rear. When he was about ten feet behind him, he flapped his arms at his sides. The bull lifted his head indolendy and dien lowered it again and continued to eat. Mr. Greenleaf stooped again and picked up somediing and threw it at him with a vicious swing. She decided it was a sharp rock for die bull leapt and dien began to gallop until he disappeared over die rim of die hill. Mr. Greenleaf followed at his leisure.

"You needn't diink you're going to lose him!" she cried and started die car

straight across die pasture. She had to drive slowly over die terraces and when she reached die gate, Mr. Greenleaf and die bull were nowhere in sight. This pasture was smaller dian the last, a green arena, encircled almost entirely by woods. She got out and closed the gate and stood looking for some sign of Mr. Green-leaf but he had disappeared completely. She knew at once that bis plan was to lose the bull in the woods. Eventually, she would see him emerge somewhere from die circle of trees and come limping toward her and when he finally reached her, he would say, "If you can find that gentleman in them woods, you're better than me."

She was going to say, "Mr. Greenleaf, if I have to walk into diose woods with you and stay all afternoon, we are going to find that bull and shoot him. You are going to shoot him if I have to pull the trigger for you." When he saw she meant business he would return and shoot the bull quickly himself.

She got back into the car and drove to the center of die pasture where he would not have so far to walk to reach her when he came out of the woods. At this moment she could picture him sitting on a stump, marking lines in the ground widi a stick. She decided she would wait exactly ten minutes by her watch. Then she would begin to honk. She got out of the car and walked around a little and then sat down on the front bumper to wait and rest. She was very tired and she lay her head back against the hood and closed her eyes. She did not understand why she should be so tired when it was only mid-morning. Through her closed eyes, she could feel die sun, red-hot overhead. She opened her eyes slightly but the white light forced her to close them again.

For some time she lay back against the hood, wondering drowsily why she was so tired. With her eyes closed, she didn't dunk of time as divided into days and nights but into past and future. She decided she was tired because she had been working continuously for fifteen years. She decided she had every right to be tired, and to rest for a few minutes before she began working again. Before any kind of judgement seat, she would be able to say: I've worked, I have not wallowed. At this very instant while she was recalling a lifetime of work, Mr. Greenleaf was loitering in the woods and Mrs. Green-leaf was probably flat on die ground, asleep over her holeful of clippings. The woman had got worse over die years and Mrs. May believed that now she was actually demented. "I'm afraid your wife has let religion warp her," she said once tactfully to Mr. Greenleaf, "Everything in moderation, you know."

"She cured a man oncet that half his gut was eat out with worms," Mr. Greenleaf said, and she had turned away, half-sickened. Poor souls, she diought now, so simple. For a few seconds she dozed.

When she sat up and looked at her watch, more than ten minutes had passed.

She had not heard any shot. A new thought occurred to her: suppose Mr. Greenleaf had aroused the bull chunking stones at him and tiie animal had turned on him and run him up against a tree and gored him? The irony of it deepened: O.T. and E.T. would then get a shyster lawyer and sue her. It would be the fitting end to her fifteen years with the Greenleafs. She thought of it almost with pleasure as if she had hit on the perfect ending for a story she was telling her friends. Then she dropped it, for Mr. Greenleaf had a gun with him and she had insurance.

She decided to honk. She got up and reached inside the car window and gave three sustained honks and two or three shorter ones to let him know she was getting impatient. Then she went back and sat down on the bumper again.

In a few minutes sometliing emerged from the tree line, a black heavy shadow that tossed its head several times and then bounded forward. After a second she saw it was the bull. He was crossing the pasture toward her at a slow gallop, a gay almost rocking gait as if he were overjoyed to find her again. She looked beyond him to see if Mr. Greenleaf was coming out of the woods too but he was not. "Here he is, Mr. Greenleaf!" she called and looked on the other side of the pasture to see if he could be coming out there but he was not in sight. She looked back and saw that the bull, his head lowered, was racing toward her. She remained perfectly still, not in fright, but in a freezing unbelief. She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her as if she had no sense of distance, as if the could not decide at once what his intention was, and the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed. One of his horns sank until it pierced her heart and the other curved around her side and held her in an unbreakable grip. She continued to stare straight ahead but die entire scene in front of her had changed—die tree line was a dark wound in a world diat was notiiing but sky—and she had die look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds die light unbearable.

Mr. Greenleaf was running toward her from the side with his gun raised and she saw him coming though she was not looking in his direction. She saw him approaching on the outside of some invisible circle, the tree line gaping behind him and notliing under his feet. He shot the bull four times through the eye. She did not hear the shots but she felt the quake in the huge body as it sank, pulling her forward on its head, so that she seemed, when Mr. Greenleaf reached her, to be bent over whispering some last discovery into the animal's ear.

A View of the Woods

THE week before, Mary Fortune and the old man had spent every morning watching the machine that lifted out dirt and threw it in a pile. The construction was going on by the new lakeside on one of the lots that the old man had sold to somebody who was going to put up a fishing club. He and Mary Fortune drove down there every morning about ten o'clock and he parked his car, a battered mulberry-colored Cadillac, on the embankment that overlooked the spot where the work was going on. The red corrugated lake eased up to within fifty feet of the construction and was bordered on the other side by a black line of woods which appeared at both ends of the view to walk across the water and continue along the edge of the fields. He sat on the bumper and Mary Fortune straddled the hood and they watched, sometimes for hours, while the machine systematically ate a square red hole in what had once been a cow pasture. It happened to be the only pasture that Pitts had succeeded in getting the bitterweed off and when the old man had sold it, Pitts had nearly had a stroke; and as far as Mr. Fortune was concerned, he could have gone on and had it. "Any fool that would let a cow pasture interfere with progress is **not** on my books," he had said to Mary Fortune several times from **hit** scat on the bumper, but the child did not have eyes for anything but the machine. She sat on the hood, looking down into the **red** pit, watching the big disembodied gullet gorge itself on the clay, **then,** with the sound of a deep sustained nausea and a slow mechanical revulsion, turn and spit it up. Her pale eyes behind her **spectacles** followed the repeated motion of it again and again and her face—a small replica of the old man's—never lost its look of complete absorption.

No one was particularly glad that Mary Fortune looked like her grandfather except the old man himself. He thought it added gready to her attractiveness. He thought she was the smartest and the prettiest child he had ever seen and he let die rest of diem know that if, IF that was, he left anything to anybody, it would be Mary Fortune he left it to. She was now nine, short and broad like himself, with his very light blue eyes, his wide prominent forehead, his steady penetrating scowl and his rich florid complexion; but she was like him on the inside too. She had, to a singular degree, his intelligence, his strong will, and his push and drive. Though there was seventy years' difference in their ages, the spiritual distance between them was shght. She was the only member of the family he had any respect for.

He didn't have any use for her mother, his third or fourth daughter (he could never remember which), though she considered that she took care of him. She considered—being careful not to say it, only to look it—that she was the one putting up with him in his old age and that she was the one he should leave the place to. She had married an idiot named Pitts and had had seven children, all likewise idiots except the youngest, Mary Fortune, who was a throwback to him. Pitts was the kind who couldn't keep his hands on a nickel and Mr. Fortune had allowed them, ten years ago, to move onto his place and farm it. What Pitts made went to Pitts but the land belonged to Fortune and he was- careful to keep the fact before them. When the well had gone dry, he had not allowed Pitts to have a deep well drilled but had insisted that they pipe their water from the spring. He did not intend to pay for a drilled well himself and he knew that if he let Pitts pay for it, whenever he had occasion to say to Pitts, "It's my land you're sitting on," Pitts would be able to say to him, "Well, it's my pump that's pumping the water you're drinking."

Being there ten years, the Pittses had got to feel as if they owned the place. The daughter had been born and raised on it but the old man considered that when she married Pitts she showed that she preferred Pitts to home; and when she came back, she came back like any other tenant, though he would not allow them to pay rent for the same reason he would not allow them to drill a well. Anyone over sixty years of age is in an uneasy position unless he controls the greater interest and every now and then he gave the Pittses a practical lesson by selling off a lot. Nothing infuriated Pitts more than to see him sell off a piece of the property to an outsider, because Pitts wanted to buy it himself.

Pitts was a thin, long-jawed, irascible, sullen, sulking individual and his wife was the duty-proud kind: It's my duty to stay here and take care of Papa. Who would do it if I didn't? I do it knowing full well I'll get no reward for it. I do it because it's my duty.

The old man was not taken in by this for a minute. He knew they were waiting impatiently for the day when they could put him in a hole eight feet deep and cover him up with dirt. Then, even if he did not leave die place to them, they figured they would be able to buy it. Secretly he had made his will and left everything in trust to Mary Fortune, naming his lawyer and not Pitts as executor. When **he** died Mary Fortune could make the rest of them jump; and he didn't doubt for a minute that she would be able to"do it.

Ten years ago tiiey had announced that diey were going to name **the** new baby Mark Fortune Pitts, after him, if it were a boy, and **he** had not delayed in telling

them that if they coupled his name witri die name Pitts he would put them off the place. When the baby came, a girl, and he had seen diat even at the age of one day **she** bore his unmistakable likeness, he had relented and suggested himself tiiat diey name her Mary Fortune, after his beloved mother, **who** had died seventy years ago, bringing him into the world.

The Fortune place was in the country on a clay road that left die paved road fifteen miles away and he would never have been able to **tell** off any lots if it had not been for progress, which had always been **his** ally. He was not one of tiiese old people who fight improvement, **who** object to everytxiing new and cringe at every change. He wanted to see a paved highway in front of his house with plenty of new-model cars on it, he wanted to see a supermarket store across **the** road from him, he wanted to see a gas station, a motel, a drive-in picture-show within easy distance. Progress had suddenly set **ail** rfiis in motion. The electric power company had built a dam on the river and flooded great areas of the surrounding country and the lake that resulted touched his land along a half-mile stretch. Every Tom, Dick and Harry, every dog and his brodier, wanted a lot on the lake. There was talk of their getting a telephone line. There was talk of paving die road diat ran in front of die Fortune place. There was talk of an eventual town. He thought diis should be called Fortune, Georgia. He was a man of advanced vision, even if he was seventy-nine years old.

The machine diat drew up the dirt had stopped die day before and today they were watching the hole being smoothed out by two huge yellow bulldozers. His property had amounted to eight hundred acres before he began selling lots. He had sold five twenty-acre lots on the back of the place and every time he sold one, Pitts's blood pressure had gone up twenty points. "The Pittses are die kind that would let a cow pasture interfere with die future," he said to Mary Fortune, "but not you and me." The fact diat Mary Fortune was a Pitts too was something he ignored, in a gentlemanly fashion, as if it were an affliction the child was not responsible for. He liked to think of her as being thoroughly of his clay. He sat on the **bumper** and she sat on the hood widi her bare feet on his shoulders. One of the bulldozers had moved under them to shave die side of die embankment diey were parked on. If he had moved his feet a few inches out, the old man could have dangled them over die edge.

"If you don't watch him," Mary Fortune shouted above die noise of the machine, "he'll cut off some of your dirt!" "Yonder's the stob," die old man yelled. "He hasn't gone beyond the stob."

"Not YET he hasn't," she roared.

The bulldozer passed beneath diem and went on to die far side.

"Well you watch," he said. "Keep your eyes open and if he knocks diat stob, **I'll** stop him. The Pittses are die kind diat would let **a** cow pasture or a mule lot or a row of beans interfere with progress," he continued. "The people like you and me with heads on **their** shoulders know you can't stop the marcher time for a cow. . . ."

"He's shaking the stob on die other side!" she screamed and **before** he could stop her, she had jumped down from the hood and **was** running along the edge of die embankment, her little yellow **dress** billowing out behind.

"Don't run so near the edge," he yelled but she had already reached the stob and was squatting down by it to see how much it had been shaken. She leaned over the embankment and shook her first at die man on the bulldozer. He waved at her and went on about his business. More sense in her little finger than all die rest of that tribe in their heads put together, the old man said to himself, and watched with pride as she started back to him.

She had a head of diick, very fine, sand-colored hair—the exact kind he had had when he had had any—diat grew straight and was cut just above her eyes and down the sides of her cheeks to the tips of her ears so diat it formed a kind of door opening onto die central part of her face. Her glasses were silver-rimmed like his and she even walked the way he did, stomach forward, with a careful abrupt gait, somediing between a rock and a shuffle. She was walking so close to the edge of die embankment that the outside of her right foot was flush with it.

"I said don't walk so close to the edge," he called; "you fall off there and you won't live to see the day this place gets built up." He was always very careful to see that she avoided dangers. He would not allow her to sit in snakey places or put her hands on bushes diat might hide hornets.

She didn't move an inch. She had a habit of his of not hearing what she didn't want to hear and since this was a little trick he had taught her himself, he had to admire the way she practiced it. He foresaw that in her own old age it would serve her well. She reached die car and climbed back onto the hood widiout a word and put her feet back on his shoulders where she had had diem before, as if he were no more dian a part of the automobile. Her attention returned to die far bulldozer.

"Remember what you won't get if you don't mind," her grandfather remarked.

He was a strict disciplinarian but he had never whipped her. There were some children, like die first six Pittses, whom he thought should be whipped once a week on principle, but there were other ways to control intelligent children and he had never laid a rough hand on Mary Fortune. Furthermore, he had never allowed her mother or her brothers and sisters so much as to slap her. The elder Pitts was a different matter.

He was a man of a nasty temper and of ugly unreasonable resentments. Time and again, Mr. Fortune's heart had pounded to see him rise slowly from his place at the table—not the head, Mr. Fortune sat there, but from his place at die side—and abruptly, for no reason, with no explanation, jerk his head at Mary Fortune and say, "Come widi me," and leave the room, unfastening his belt as he went. A look that was completely foreign to die child's face would appear on it. The old man could not define die look but it infuriated him. It was a look diat was part terror and part respect and part somediing else, something very like cooperation. This look would appear on her face and she would get up and follow Pitts out. They would get in his truck and drive down die road out of earshot, where he would beat her.

Mr. Fortune knew for a fact that he beat her because he had followed diem in his car and had seen it happen. He had watched from behind a boulder about a hundred feet away while die child clung to a pine tree and Pitts, as mediodically as if he were whacking a bush widi a sling blade, beat her around the ankles widi his **belt.** All she had done was jump up and down as if she were standing on a hot stove and make a whimpering noise like a dog diat **wai** being peppered. Pitts had kept at it for about three minutes **and** dien he had turned, without a word, and got back in his truck and left her diere, and she had slid down under the tree and taken bodi feet in her hands and rocked back and forth. The old man **had** crept forward to catch her. Her face was contorted into a puzzle of small red lumps and her nose and eyes were running. He sprang on her and sputtered, "Why didn't you hit him back? Where's your spirit? Do you diink I'd a let him beat me?"

She had jumped up and started backing away from him with **her** jaw stuck out. "Nobody beat me," she said.

"Didn't I see it with my own eyes?" he exploded.

"Nobody is here and nobody beat me," she said. "Nobody's **ever** beat me in my life and if anybody did, I'd kill him. You can see **for** yourself nobody is here."

"Do you call me a liar or a blindman!" he shouted. "I saw **him** widi my own two eyes and you never did a diing but let him do it, you never did a thing but

hang onto diat tree and dance up **and** down a little and blubber and if it had been me, I'd a swung my fist in his face and . . ." "Nobody was here and nobody beat me and if anybody did I'd kill him I" she yelled and then turned and dashed off through the woods.

"And I'm a Poland china pig and black is white!" he had roared after her and he had sat down on a small rock under the tree, disgusted and furious. This was Pitts's revenge on him. It was as if it **Were** *he* that Pitts was driving down the road to beat and it was as if *he* were the one submitting to it. He had thought at first that he could stop him by saying that if he beat her, he would put diem **off** the place but when he had tried that, Pitts had said, "Put me off and you put her off too. Go right ahead. She's mine to whip and **I'll** whip her every day of the year if it suits me."

Anytime he could make Pitts feel his hand he was determined to do it and at present he had a little scheme up his sleeve that was going to be a considerable blow to Pitts. He was thinking of it widi **relish** when he told Mary Fortune to remember what she wouldn't **get** if she didn't mind, and he added, without waiting for an answer, **that** he might be selling another lot soon and that if he did, he might give her a bonus but not if she gave him any sass. He had frequent little verbal tilts with her but this was a sport like putting a mirror up in front of a rooster and watching him fight his reflection.

"I don't want no bonus," Mary Fortune said.

"I ain't ever seen you refuse one."

"You ain't ever seen me ask for one neidier," she said.

"How much have you laid by?" he asked.

"Noner yer bidnis," she said and stamped his shoulders widi her **feet.** "Don't be buttin into my bidnis."

"I bet you got it sewed up in your mattress," he said, "just like an **old** nigger woman. You ought to put it in die bank. I'm going to **start** you an account just as soon as I complete diis deal. Won't anybody be able to check on it but me and you."

The bulldozer moved under them again and drowned out die rest of what he wanted to say. He waited and when die noise had passed, he could hold it in no longer. "I'm going to sell the lot right in front of **die** house for a gas station," he said. "Then we won't have to go **down** the road to get the car filled up, just step out die front door."

The Fortune house was set back about two hundred feet from the road and it was this two hundred feet that he intended to sell. It was the part that his daughter airily called "the lawn" though it was nothing but a field of weeds.

"You mean," Mary Fortune said after a minute, "the lawn?" "Yes mam I" he said. "I mean the lawn," and he slapped his knee.

She did not say anything and he turned and looked up at her. There in the little rectangular opening of hair was his face looking back at him, but it was a reflection not of his present expression but of the darker one that indicated his displeasure. "That's where we play," she muttered.

"Well there's plenty of other places you can play," he said, irked by this lack of enthusiasm.

"We won't be able to see the woods across the road," she said.

The old man stared at her. "The woods across the road?" he repeated. "We won't be able to see the view," she said. "The view?" he repeated. "The woods," she said; "we won't be able to see the woods from the porch."

"The woods from the porch?" he repeated.

Then she said, "My daddy grazes his calves on that lot."

The old man's wrath was delayed an instant by shock. Then it exploded in a roar. He jumped up and turned and slammed his fist on the hood of the car. "He can graze them somewheres else I" "You fall off that embankment and you'll wish you hadn't," she said.

He moved from in front of the car around to the side, keeping his eye on her all the time. "Do you think I care where he grazes his calvesl Do you think I'll let a calf interfere with my bidnis? Do you think I give a damn hoot where that fool grazes his calves?"

She sat, her red face darker than her hair, exactly reflecting his expression now. "He who calls his brother a fool is subject to hell fire," she said.

"Jedge not," he shouted, "lest ye be not jedgedl" The tinge of his face was a shade more purple than hers. "YouI" he said. "You let him beat you any time he wants to and don't do a thing but blubber a little and jump up and down I"

"He nor nobody else has ever touched me," she said, measuring off each word in a deadly flat tone. "Nobody's ever put a hand on me and if anybody did, I'd kill him."

"And black is white," the old man piped, "and night is dayl"

The bulldozer passed below them. With their faces about a foot apart, each held the same expression until the noise had receded. Then the old man said, "Walk home by yourself. I refuse to ride a Jezebel I"

"And I refuse to ride with the Whore of Babylon," she said and slid off the other side of the car and started off through the pasture.

"A whore is a woman I" he roared. "That's how much you know I" But she did not deign to turn around and answer him back, and as he watched the small robust figure stalk across the yellow-dotted field toward the woods, his pride in her, as if it couldn't help itself, returned like the gentle little tide on the new lake—all except that part of it that had to do with her refusal to stand up to Pitts; that pulled back like an undertow. If he could have taught her to stand up to Pitts the way she stood up to him, she would have been a perfect child, as fearless and sturdy-minded as anyone could want; but it was her one failure of character. It was the one point on which she did not resemble him. He turned and looked away over the lake to the woods across it and told himself that in five years, instead of woods, there would be houses and stores and parking places, and that the credit for it could go largely to him.

He meant to teach the child spirit by example and since he had definitely made up his mind, he announced that noon at the dinner table that he was negotiating with a man named Tilman to sell the lot in front of the house for a gas station.

His daughter, sitting with her worn-out air at the foot of the table, let out a moan as if a dull knife were being turned slowly in **her** chest. "You mean the lawn I" she moaned and fell back in her **chair** and repeated in an almost inaudible voice, "He means the lawn."

The other six Pitts children began to bawl and pipe, "Where we **play** I" "Don't let him do that, Pa!" "We won't be able to see the road I" and similar idiocies. Mary Fortune did not say anything. She had a mulish reserved look as if she were planning some business of her own. Pitts had stopped eating and was staring in front of him. His plate was full but his fists sat motionless like two dark quartz stones on either side of it. His eyes began to move from child to child around the table as if he were hunting for one particular one of them. Finally they stopped on Mary Fortune sitting next to her grandfather. "You done this to us," he muttered.

"I didn't," she said but there was no assurance in her voice. It was only a quaver, the voice of a frightened child.

Pitts got up and said, "Come with me," and turned and walked out, loosening his belt as he went, and to the old man's complete despair, she slid away from the table and followed him, almost ran after him, out the door and into the truck

behind him, and they drove off.

This cowardice affected Mr. Fortune as if it were his own. It made him physically sick. "He beats an innocent child," he said to his daughter, who was apparently still prostrate at the end of die table, "and not one of you lifts a hand to stop him."

"You ain't lifted yours neither," one of the boys said in an undertone and there was a general mutter from that chorus of frogs. "I'm an old man with a heart condition," he said. "I can't stop an ox."

"She put you up to it," his daughter murmured in a languid list less tone, her head rolling back and forth on the rim of her chair. "She puts you up to everything."

"No child never put me up to nothing!" he yelled. "You're no kind of a motherl You're a disgrace! That child is an angel! A saint!" he shouted in a voice so high that it broke and he had to scurry out of the room.

The rest of the afternoon he had to lie on his bed. His heart, whenever he knew the child had been beaten, felt as if it **were** slightly too large for the space that was supposed to hold it. But **now** he was more determined than ever to see the filling station go up in front of the house, and if it gave Pitts a stroke, so much **die** better. If it gave him a stroke and paralyzed him, he would be served right and he would never be able to beat her again.

Mary Fortune was never angry with him for long, or seriously, and though he did not see her the rest of that day, when he woke up the next morning, she was sitting astride his chest ordering him to make haste so that they would not miss the concrete mixer.

The workmen were laying the foundation for the fishing club when diey arrived and the concrete mixer was already in operation. It was about the size and color of a circus elephant; they stood and watched it churn for a half-hour or so. At eleven-thirty, the old man had an appointment with Tilman to discuss his transaction and they had to leave. He did not tell Mary Fortune where they were going but only that he had to see a man.

Tilman operated a combination country store, filling station, scrap-metal dump, used-car lot and dance hall five miles down die highway that connected with the dirt road that passed in front of the Fortune place. Since the dirt road would soon be paved, he wanted a good location on it for another such enterprise. He was an up-and-coming man—the kind, Mr. Fortune thought, who was never just in line with progress but always a little ahead of it so diat he

could be there to meet it when it arrived. Signs up and down the highway announced that Tilman's was only five miles away, only four, only three, only two, only one; "Watch out for Tilman's, Around diis bend I" and finally, "Here it is, Friends, TILMAN'SI" in dazzling red letters.

Tilman's was bordered on either side by a field of old used-car bodies, a kind of ward for incurable automobiles. He also sold outdoor ornaments, such as stone cranes and chickens, urns, jardinieres, whirligigs, and farther back from the road, so as not to depress his dance-hall customers, a line of tombstones and monuments. Most of his businesses went on out-of-doors, so that his store building itself had not involved excessive expense. It was a one-room wooden structure onto which he had added, behind, a long tin hall equipped for dancing. This was divided into two sections, Colored and White, each with its private nickelodeon. He had a barbecue pit and sold barbecued sandwiches and soft drinks.

As diey drove up under die shed of Tilman's place, die old man glanced at the child sitting with her feet drawn up on the seat and her chin resting on her knees. He didn't know if she would remember that it was Tilman he was going to sell the lot to or not.

"What you going in here for?" she asked suddenly, with a sniffing look as if she scented an enemy.

"Noner yer bidnis," he said. "You just sit in the car and when I come out, I'll bring you something."

"Don'tcher bring me nothing," she said darkly, "because I won't be here."

"HawI" he said. "Now you're here, it's nothing for you to do but wait," and he got out and without paying her any further attention, he entered the dark store where Tilman was waiting for him.

When he came out in half an hour, she was not in the car. Hiding, he decided. He started walking around the store to see if she was in the back. He looked in the doors of the two sections of the dance hall and walked on around by the tombstones. Then his eye roved over the field of sinking automobiles and he realized that she could be in or behind any one of two hundred of them. He came back out in front of the store. A Negro boy, drinking a purple drink, was sitting on the ground with his back against the sweating ice cooler.

"Where did that little girl go to, boy?" he asked.

"I ain't seen nair little girl," the boy said.

The old man irritably fished in his pocket and handed him a nickel and said, "A pretty little girl in a yeller cotton dress." "If you speakin about a stout chile look lak you," the boy said, "she gone off in a truck with a white man."

"What kind of a truck, what kind of a white man?" he yelled.

"It were a green pick-up truck," the boy said smacking his lips, "and a white man she call 'daddy.' They gone thataway some time ago."

The old man, trembling, got in his car and started home. His feelings raced back and forth between fury and mortification. She had never left him before and certainly never for Pitts. Pitts had ordered her to get in the truck and she was afraid not to. But when he reached this conclusion he was more furious than ever. What **wai** the matter with her that she couldn't stand up to Pitts? Why was there this one flaw in her character when he had trained her so well in everything else? It was an ugly mystery.

When he reached the house and climbed the front steps, there **the** was sitting in the swing, looking glum-faced in front of her across the field he was going to sell. Her eyes were puffy and pink-rimmed but he didn't see any red marks on her legs. He sat down in the swing beside her. He meant to make his voice severe but instead it came out crushed, as if it belonged to a suitor trying to reinstate himself.

"What did you leave me for? You ain't ever left me before," he **said.**

"Because I wanted to," she said, looking straight ahead.

"You never wanted to," he said. "He made you."

"I toljer I was going and I went," she said in a slow emphatic voice, not looking at him, "and now you can go on and lemme alone." There was somediing very final, in the sound of diis, a tone that had not come up before in their disputes. She stared across the lot where there was nothing but a profusion of pink and yellow and purple weeds, and on across the red road, to the sullen line of black pine woods fringed on top with green. Behind that line was a narrow gray-blue line of more distant woods and beyond that nothing but die sky, entirely blank except for one or two threadbare clouds. She looked into this scene as if it were a person that she preferred to him.

"It's my lot, ain't it?" he asked. "Why are you so up-in-the-air about me selling my own lot?"

"Because it's die lawn," she said. Her nose and eyes began to run horribly but she held her face rigid and licked the water off as soon as it was in reach of her tongue. "We won't be able to see across die road," she said.

The old man looked across the road to assure himself again that there was nodiing over there to see. "I never have seen you act in such a way before," he said in an incredulous voice. "There's not a dung over tliere but the woods."

"We won't be able to see 'urn," she said, "and diat's die *lawn* and my daddy grazes his calves on it."

At diat die old man stood up. "You act more like a Pitts dian a Fortune," he said. He had never made such an ugly remark to her before and he was sorry die instant he had said it. It hurt him more than it did her. He turned and went in the house and upstairs to his room.

Several times during the afternoon, he got up from his bed and looked out the window across the "lawn" to the line of woods she said they wouldn't be able to see any more. Every time he saw the same thing: woods—not a mountain, not a waterfall, not any kind of planted bush or flower, just woods. The sunlight was woven through them at that particular time of the afternoon so that every thin pine trunk stood out in all its nakedness. A pine trunk is a pine trunk, he said to himself, and anybody that wants to see one don't have to go far in this neighborhood. Every time he got up and looked out, he was reconvinced of his wisdom in selling the lot. The dissatisfaction it caused Pitts would be permanent, but he could make it up to Mary Fortune by buying her something. With grown people, a road led either to heaven or hell, but with children there were always stops along the way where their attention could be turned with a trifle.

The third time he got up to look at the woods, it was almost six o'clock and the gaant trunks appeared to be raised in a pool of red light that gushed from the almost hidden sun setting behind thenu The old man stared for some time, as if for a prolonged instant he were caught up out of the rattle of everything that led to the future and were held there in the midst of an uncomfortable mystery that he had not apprehended before. He saw it, in his hallucination, as if someone were wounded behind the woods and the trees were bathed in blood. After a few minutes this unpleasant vision was broken by the presence of Pitts's pick-up truck grinding to a halt below the window. He returned to his bed and shut his eyes and against the closed lids hellish red trunks rose up in a black wood.

At the supper table nobody addressed a word to him, including Mary Fortune. He ate quickly and returned again to his room and spent the evening pointing out to himself the advantages for the future of having an establishment like Tilman's so near. They would not have to go any distance for gas. Anytime they needed a loaf of bread, all they would have to do would be step out their front door into Tilman's back door. They could sell milk to Tilman. Tilman was a likable fellow. Tilman would draw other business. The road would soon be paved. Travelers from all over the country would stop at Tilman's. If his daughter thought she was better than Tilman, it would be well to take her down a little. All men were created free and equal. When this phrase sounded in his head, his patriotic sense triumphed and he realized that it was his duty to sell the lot, that he must insure the future. He looked out the window at die moon shining over the woods across the road and listened for a while to the hum of crickets and treefrogs, and

beneath their racket, he could hear the throb of the future town of Fortune.

He went to bed certain that just as usual, he would wake up in die morning looking into a little red mirror framed in a door of fine hair. She would have forgotten all about the sale and after breakfast diey would drive into town and get the legal papers from the courthouse. On the way back he would stop at Tilman's and close the deal.

When he opened his eyes in the morning, he opened them on the empty ceiling. He pulled himself up and looked around the room but she was not there. He hung over the edge of the bed and looked beneath it but she was not there either. He got up and dressed and went outside. She was sitting in the swing on the front porch, exactly the way she had been yesterday, looking across the lawn into the woods. The old man was very much irritated. Every morning since she had been able to climb, he had waked up to find her either on his bed or underneath it. It was apparent that this morning she preferred the sight of the woods. He decided to ignore her behavior for the present and then bring it up later when she was over her pique. He sat down in the swing beside her but she continued to look at die woods. "I thought you and me'd go into town and have us a look at the boats in the new boat store," he said.

She didn't turn her head but she asked suspiciously, in a loud voice. "What else are you going for?"

"Nodiing else," he said.

After a pause she said, "If that's all, I'll go," but she did not bother to look at him.

"Well put on your shoes," he said. "I ain't going to the city with a barefoot woman." She did not bother to laugh at this joke.

The weadier was as indifferent as her disposition. The sky did not look as if it were going to rain or as if it were not going to rain. It was an unpleasant gray and the sun had not troubled to come out. All die way into town, she sat looking at her feet, which stuck out in front of her, encased in heavy brown school shoes. The old man had often sneaked up on her and found her alone in conversation with her feet and he thought she was speaking with them silently now. Every now and then her lips moved but she said nothing to him and let all his remarks pass as if she had not heard diem. He decided it was going to cost him considerable to buy her good humor again and that he had better do it widi a boat, since he wanted one too. She had been talking boats ever since die water backed up onto his place. They went first to die boat store. "Show us die yachts for po' folks I" he shouted jovially to die clerk as they entered.

"They're all for po' folks I" the clerk said. "You'll be po' when you finish buying one!" He was a stout youdi in a yellow shirt and blue pants and he had a

ready wit. They exchanged several clever remarks in rapid-fire succession. Mr. Fortune looked at Mary Fortune to see if her face had brightened. She stood staring absendy over the side of an outboard motor boat at die opposite wall.

"Ain't die lady innerested in boats?" die clerk asked.

She turned and wandered back out onto die sidewalk and got in the car again. The old man looked after her widi amazement. He could not believe that a child of her intelligence could be acting diis way over die mere sale of a field. "I diink she must be coming down widi somediing," he said. "We'll come back again," and he returned to the car.

"Let's go get us an ice-cream cone," he suggested, looking at her with concern.

"I don't want no ice-cream cone," she said.

His actual destination was the courdiouse but he did not want to make this apparent. "How'd you like to visit die ten-cent store while I tend to a little bidnis of mine?" he asked. "You can buy yourself somediing widi a quarter I brought along."

"I ain't got nothing to do in no ten-cent store," she said. "I don't want no quarter of yours."

If a boat was of no interest, he should not have diought a quarter

would be and reproved himself for diat stupidity. "Well what's die matter, sister?" he asked kindly. "Don't you feel good?"

She turned and looked him straight in the face and said with a slow concentrated ferocity, "It's the lawn. My daddy grazes his calves there. We won't be able to see die woods any more."

The old man had held his fury in as long as he could. "He beats you!" he shouted. "And you worry about where he's going to graze his calves!"

"Nobody's ever beat me in my life," she said, "and if anybody did, I'd kill him."

A man seventy-nine years of age cannot let himself be run over by a child of nine. His face set in a look that was just as determined as hers. "Are you a Fortune," he said, "or are you a Pitts? Make up your mind."

Her voice was loud and positive and belligerent. "I'm Mary— Fortune—Pitts," she said.

"Well I," he shouted, "am PURE Fortune!"

There was nothing she could say to this and she showed it. For an instant she looked completely defeated, and the old man saw with a disturbing clearness that this was the Pitts look. What he saw was the Pitts look, pure and simple, and he felt personally stained by it, as if it had been found on his own face. He turned in disgust and backed the car out and drove straight to the courthouse.

The courthouse was a red and white blaze-faced building set in the center of a

square from which most of the grass had been worn off. He parked in front of it and said, "Stay here," in an imperious tone and got out and slammed the car door.

It took him a half-hour to get the deed and have the sale paper drawn up and when he returned to the car, she was sitting on the back seat in the corner. The expression on that part of her face that he could see was foreboding and withdrawn. The sky had darkened also and there was a hot sluggish tide in the air, the kind felt when a tornado is possible.

"We better get on before we get caught in a storm," he said and emphatically, "because I got one more place to stop at on the way home," but he might have been chauffeuring a small dead body for all the answer he got.

On the way to Tilman's he reviewed once more the many just reasons that were leading him to his present action and he could not locate a flaw in any of them. He decided that while this attitude of hers would not be permanent, he was permanently disappointed in her and that when she came around she would have to apologize; and that there would be no boat. He was coming to realize slowly that his trouble with her had always been that he had not shown enough firmness. He had been too generous. He was so occupied with these thoughts that he did not notice the signs that said how many miles to Tilman's until the last one exploded joyfully in his face: "Here it is, Friends, TILMAN'SI" He pulled in under the shed.

He got out without so much as looking at Mary Fortune and entered the dark store where Tilman, leaning on the counter in front of a triple shelf of canned goods, was waiting for him.

Tilman was a man of quick action and few words. He sat habitually with his arms folded on the counter and his insignificant head weaving snake-fashion above diem. He had a triangular-shaped face with the point at the bottom and the top of his skull was covered with a cap of freckles. His eyes were green and very narrow and his tongue was always exposed in his partly opened mouui. He had his checkbook handy and they got down to business at once. It did not take him long to look at the deed and sign the bill of sale. Then Mr. Fortune signed it and they grasped hands over *tint* counter.

Mr. Fortune's sense of relief as he grasped Tilman's hand was extreme. What was done, he felt, .was done and there could be no more argument, with her or with himself. He felt that he had acted on principle and that the future was assured.

Just as their hands loosened, an instant's change came over Tilman's face and he disappeared completely under the counter as if he had been snatched by the

feet from below. A bottle crashed against the line of tinned goods behind where he had been. The old man whirled around. Mary Fortune was in the door, red-faced and wild-looking, with another bottle lifted to hurl. As he ducked, it broke behind him on the counter and she grabbed another from the crate. He sprang at her but she tore to the other side of die store, screaming something unintelligible and throwing everydiing within her reach. The old man pounced again and this time he caught her by the tail of her dress and pulled her backward out of the store. Then he got a better grip and lifted her, wheezing and whimpering but suddenly limp in his arms, the few feet to the car. He managed to get die door open and dump her inside. Then he ran around to the odier side and got in himself and drove away as fast as he could.

His heart felt as if it were the size of the car and was racing forward, carrying him to some inevitable destination faster than he had ever been carried before. For the first five minutes he did not think but only sped forward as if he were being driven inside his own fury. Gradually the power of thought returned to him. Mary Fortune, rolled into a ball in the corner of the seat, was snuffling and heaving.

He had never seen a child behave in such a way in his life. Neither his own children nor anyone else's had ever displayed such temper in his presence, and he had never for an instant imagined that the child he had trained himself, the child who had been his constant companion for nine years, would embarrass him like this. The child he had never lifted a hand to I

Then he saw, with the sudden vision that sometimes comes with delayed recognition, that that had been his mistake.

She respected Pitts because, even with no just cause, he beat her; and if he—with his just cause—did not beat her now, he would have nobody to blame but himself if she turned out a hellion. He saw that the time had come, that he could no longer avoid whipping her, and as he turned off the highway onto the dirt road leading to home, he told himself diat when he finished *with* her, she would never dirow another bottle again.

He raced along die clay road until he came to the line where his own property began and dien he turned off onto a side path, just wide enough for die automobile and bounced for a half a mile through the woods. He stopped the car at the exact spot where he had seen Pitts take his belt to her. It was a place where die road widened so diat two cars could pass or one could turn around, an ugly red bald spot surrounded by long diin pines diat appeared to be gadiered diere to witness anything diat would take place in such a clearing. A few stones protruded from the clay.

"Get out," he said and reached across her and opened the door.

She got out without looking at him or asking what they were going to do and he got out on his side and came around die front of the car.

"Now I'm going to whip you!" he said and his voice was extra loud and hollow and had a vibrating quality diat appeared to be taken up and passed through the tops of die pines. He did not want to get caught in a downpour while he was whipping her and he said, "Hurry up and get ready against that tree," and began to take off his belt.

What he had in mind to do appeared to come very slowly as if it had to penetrate a fog in her head. She did not move but grad^ ually her confused expression began to clear. Where a few seconds before her face had been red and distorted and unorganized, it drained now of every vague line until nodiing was left on it but positiveness, a look that went slowly past determination and reached certainty. "Nobody has ever beat me," she said, "and if anybody tries it, I'll kill him."

"I don't want no sass," he said and started toward her. His knees felt very unsteady, as if they might turn eidier backward or for* ward.

She moved exactly one step back and, keeping her eye on him steadily, removed her glasses and dropped them behind a small rock near the tree he had told her to get ready against. "Take off your glasses," she said.

"Don't give me orders I" he said in a high voice and slapped awk* wardly at her ankles with his belt.

She was on him so quickly diat he could not have recalled which blow he felt first, whether the weight of her whole solid body or the jabs of her feet or the pummeling of her fist on his chest. He flailed the belt in the air, not knowing where to hit but trying to get her off him until he could decide where to get a grip on her.

"Leggol" he shouted. "Leggo I tell you!" But she seemed to be everywhere, coming at him from all directions at once. It was as if he were being attacked not by one child but by a pack of small demons all widi stout brown school shoes and small rocklike fists.

His glasses flew to die side.

"I toljer to take them off," she growled widiout pausing.

He caught his knee and danced on one foot and a rain of blows fell on his stomach. He felt five claws in the flesh of his upper arm where she was hanging from while her feet mechanically battered his knees and her free fist pounded him again and again in the chest. Then with horror he saw her face rise up in front of his, tcedi exposed, and he roared like a bull as she bit the side of his jaw. He seemed to see his own face coming to bite him from several sides at once but he could not attend to it for he was being kicked indiscriminately, in the stomach

and then in the crotch. Suddenly he threw himself on the ground and began to roll like a man on fire. She was on top of him at once, rolling with him and still kicking, and now widi both fists free to batter his chest.

"I'm an old man I" he piped. "Leave me alone!" But she did not stop. She began a fresh assault on his jaw.

"Stop stop!" he wheezed. "I'm your grandfather!"

She paused, her face exactly on top of his. Pale identical eye looked into pale identical eye. "Have you had enough?" she asked.

The old man looked up into his own image. It was triumphant and hostile. "You been whipped," it said, "by me," and then it added, bearing down on each word, "and I'm PURE Pitts."

In the pause she loosened her grip and he got hold of her throat. WitJi a sudden surge of strength, he managed to roll over and reverse tJieir positions so that he was looking down into the face that was his own but had dared to call itself Pitts. With his hands still tight around her neck, he lifted her head and brought it down once hard against the rock that happened to be under it. Then he brought it down twice more. Then looking into the face in which the eyes, slowly rolling back, appeared to pay him not the slightest attention, he said, "There's not an ounce of Pitts in me."

He continued to stare at his conquered image until he perceived that diough it was absolutely silent, there was no look of remorse on it. The eyes had rolled back down and were set in a fixed glare that did not take him in. "This ought to teach you a good lesson," he said in a voice that was edged with doubt.

He managed painfully to get up on his unsteady kicked legs and to take two steps, but die enlargement of his heart which had begun in the car was still going on. He turned his head and looked behind him for a long time at the little motionless figure with its head on the rock.

Then he fell on his back and looked up helplessly along the bare trunks into the tops of the pines and his heart expanded once more with a convulsive motion. It expanded so fast that the old maa felt as if he were being pulled after it through the woods, felt as if he were running as fast as he could with the ugly pines toward die lake. He perceived that there would be a little opening there, a little place where he could escape and leave the woods behind him. He could see it in the distance already, a little opening where the white sky was reflected in the water. It grew as he ran toward it until suddenly the whole lake opened up before him, riding majestically in little corrugated folds toward his feet. He realized suddenly that he could not swim and that he had not bought the boat. On both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across die water and away into the distance. He looked

around desperately for someone to help him but the place was deserted except for one huge yellow monster which sat to the side, as stationary as he was, gorging itself on clay.

The Enduring Chill

ASBURY'S train stopped so that he would get off exactly where . his mother was standing waiting to meet him. Her thin spectacled face below him was bright with a wide smile that disappeared as she caught sight of him bracing himself behind the conductor. The smile vanished so suddenly, the shocked look that replaced it was so complete, that he realized for the first time that he must look as ill as he was. The sky was a chill gray and a startling white-gold sun, like some strange potentate from the east, was rising beyond the black woods that surrounded Timberboro. It cast a strange light over the single block of one-story brick and wooden shacks. Asbury felt that he was about to witness a majestic transformation, that the flat of roofs might at any moment turn into the mounting turrets of some exotic temple for a god he didn't know. The illusion lasted only a moment before his attention was drawn back to his mother. She had given a little cry; she looked aghast. He was pleased that she should see death in his face at once. His mother, at the age of sixty, was going to be introduced to reality and he supposed that if the experience didn't kill her, it would assist her in the process of growing up. He stepped down and greeted her. "You don't look very well," she said and gave him a long clinical stare. "I don't feel like talking," he said at once. "I've had a bad trip." Mrs. Fox observed that his left eye was bloodshot. He was puffy and pale and his hair had receded tragically for a boy of twenty-five. The thin reddish wedge of it left on top bore down in a point that seemed to lengthen his nose and give him an irritable expression that matched his tone of voice when he spoke to her. "It must have been cold up diere," she said. "Why don't you take off your coat? It's not cold down here."

"You don't have to tell me what the temperature is I" he said in a high voice. "I'm old enough to know when I want to take my coat off!" The train glided silently away behind him, leaving a view of the twin blocks of dilapidated stores. He gazed after die aluminum speck disappearing into the woods. It seemed to him that his last connection widi a larger world were vanishing forever. Then he turned and faced his mother grimly, irked that he had allowed himself, even for an instant, to see an imaginary temple in tJiis collapsing country junction. He had become entirely accustomed to die thought of death, but he had not become accustomed to the diought of deadi *here.*

He had felt the end coming on for nearly four months. Alone in his freezing flat, huddled under his two blankets and his overcoat and with three thicknesses

of the New York *Times* between, he had had a chill one night, followed by a violent sweat diat left the sheets soaking and removed all doubt from his mind about his true condition. Before diis there had been a gradual slackening of his energy and vague inconsistent aches and headaches. He had been absent so many days from his part-time job in die bookstore diat he had lost it. Since then he had been living, or just barely so, on his savings and these, diminishing day by day, had been all he had between him and home. Now tiiere was nothing. He was here.

"Where's die car?" he muttered.

"It's over yonder," his modier said.- "And your sister is asleep in the back because I don't like to come out this early by myself. There's no need to wake her up."

"No," he said, "let sleeping dogs lie," and he picked up his two bulging suitcases and started across the road widi them.

They were too heavy for him and by die time he reached die car, his mother saw that he was exhausted. He had never come home with two suitcases before. Ever since he had first gone away to college, he had come back every time with nodiing but the necessities for a two-week stay and widi a wooden resigned expression diat said he was prepared to endure die visit for exactly fourteen days. "You've brought more than usual," she observed, but he did not answer.

He opened the car door and hoisted the two bags in beside his **lister's** upturned feet, giving first the feet—in Girl Scout shoes—and **then** the rest of her a revolted look of recognition. She was packed **into** a black suit and had a white rag around her head with metal **curlers** sticking out from under the edges. Her eyes were closed **and** her mouth open. He and she had the same features except **that** hers were bigger. She was eight years older than he was and **was** principal of the county elementary school. He shut the door **softly** so she wouldn't wake up and then went around and got in **the** front seat and closed his eyes. His mother backed the car into **the** road and in a few minutes he felt it swerve into the highway. **Then** he opened his eyes. The road stretched between two open **fields** of yellow bitterweed.

"Do you think Timberboro has improved?" his mother asked. This was her standard question, meant to be taken literally.

"It's still there, isn't it?" he said in an ugly voice.

"Two of die stores have new fronts," she said. Then with a sudden ferocity, she said, "You did well to come home where you can **get** a good doctor! I'll take you to Doctor Block this afternoon."

"I am not," he said, trying to keep his voice from shaking, "going **to** Doctor Block. This afternoon or ever. Don't you diink if I'd wanted to go to a doctor I'd

have gone up there where they have **some** good ones? Don't you know they have better doctors in New **York?"**

"He would take a personal interest in you," she said. "None of **those** doctors up diere would take a personal interest in you."

"I don't want him taking a personal interest in me." Then after a minute, staring out across a blurred purple-looking field, he said, "What's wrong widi me is way beyond Block," and his voice trailed
off into a frayed sound, almost a sob.

He could not, as his friend Goetz had recommended, prepare to **see** it all as illusion, eidier what had gone before or die few weeks **that** were left to him. Goetz was certain that death was nodiing at **all.** Goetz, whose whole face had always been purple-splotched with a million indignations, had returned from six mondis in Japan as dirty as ever but as bland as the Buddha himself. Goetz took the **news** of Asbury's approaching end widi a calm indifference. Quoting somediing or odier he said, "Although die Bodhisattva leads an infinite number of creatures into nirvana, in reality there are neither any Bodhisattvas to do the leading nor any creatures to be led." However, out of some feeling for his welfare, Goetz had put forth $4.50 to take him to a lecture on Vedanta. It had been a waste of his money. While Goetz had listened enthralled to the dark little man on the platform, Asbury's bored gaze had roved among the audience. It had passed over the heads of several girls in saris, past a Japanese youth, a blue-black man with a fez, and several girls who looked like secretaries. Finally, at end of the row, it had rested on a lean spectacled figure in black, a priest. The priest's expression was of a polite but strictly reserved interest. Asbury identified his own feelings immediately in the taciturn superior expression. When the lecture was over a few students met in Goetz's flat, the priest among them, but he was equally reserved. He listened with a marked politeness to the discussion of Asbury's approaching death, but he said little. A girl in a sari remarked that self-fulfillment was out of the question since it meant salvation and the word was meaningless. "Salvation," quoted Goetz, "is the destruction of a simple prejudice,
and no one is saved."

"And what do you say to that?" Asbury asked the priest and returned his reserved smile over the heads of the others. The borders of this smile seemed to touch on some icy clarity.

"There is," the priest said, "a real probability of the New Man, assisted, of course," he added brittlely, "by the Third Person of the Trinity."

"RidiculousI" the girl in the sari said, -but the priest only brushed her with his smile, which was slightly amused now.

When he got up to leave, he silently handed Asbury a small card on which he had written his name, Ignatius Vogle, S.J., and an address. Perhaps, Asbury thought now, he should have used it for the priest appealed to him as a man of the world, someone who would have understood the unique tragedy of his death, a death whose meaning had been far beyond the twittering group around them. And how much more beyond Block. "What's wrong with me," he repeated, "is way beyond Block."

His mother knew at once what he meant: he meant he was going

to have a nervous breakdown. She did not say a word. She did not say that this was precisely what she could have told him would happen. When people think they are smart—even when they arc smart—there is nothing anybody else can say to make them see things straight, and with Asbury, the trouble was that in addition to being smart, he had an artistic temperament. She did not know where he had got it from because his father, who was a lawyer and businessman and farmer and politician all rolled into one, had certainly had his feet on the ground; and she had certainly always had hers on it. She had managed after he died to get the two of them through college and beyond; but she had observed that the more education they got, the less they could do. Their father had gone to a one-room schoolhouse through the eighth grade and he could do anything.

She could have told Asbury what would help him. She could have said, "If you would get out in the sunshine, or if you would work for a month in the dairy, you'd be a different person!" but she knew exactly how that suggestion would be received. He would be a nuisance in the dairy but she would let him work in there if he wanted to. She had let him work in there last year when he had come home and was writing the play. He had been writing a play about Negroes (why anybody would want to write a play about Negroes was beyond her) and he had said he wanted to work in the dairy with them and find out what their interests were. Their interests were in doing as little as they could get by with, as she could have told him if anybody could have told him anything. The Negroes had put up with him and he had learned to put the milkers on and once he had washed all the cans and she thought that once he had mixed feed. Then a cow had kicked him and he had not gone back to the barn again. She knew that if he would get in there now, or get out and fix fences, or do any kind of work—real work, not writing—that he might avoid this nervous breakdown. "Whatever happened to that play you were writing about the Negroes?" she asked.

"I am not writing plays," he said. "And get this through your head: I am not working in any dairy. I am not getting out in the sunshine. Fm ill. I have fever and chills and Fm dizzy and all I want you to do is to leave me alone."

"Then if you are really ill, you should see Doctor Block." "And I am not seeing

Block," he finished and ground himself down in the seat and stared intensely in front of him.

She turned into dieir driveway, a red road diat ran for a **quarter** of a mile dirough the two front pastures. The dry cows were **on** one side and the milk herd on the other. She slowed die car **and** then stopped altogether, her attention caught by a cow widi a **bad** quarter. "They haven't been attending to her," she said. **"Look** at that bag I"

Asbury turned his head abruptly in die opposite direction, but there a small, walleyed Guernsey was watching him steadily as if she sensed some bond between them. "Good God!" he cried in **an** agonized voice, "can't we go on? It's six o'clock in die morning!"

"Yes yes," his modier said and started the car quickly.

"What's diat cry of deadly pain?" his sister drawled from the back seat. "Oh it's you," she said. "Well well, we have die **artiit** with us again. How utterly utterly." She had a decidedly nasal voice-

He didn't answer her or turn his head. He had learned that much, Never answer her. "Mary George!" his mother said sharply. "Asbury is sick. Leave him alone."

"What's wrong with him?" Mary George asked.

"There's die house!" his mother said as if they were all blind but her. It rose on the crest of the hill—a white two-story farmhouse widi a wide porch and pleasant columns. She always approached it widi a feeling of pride and she had said more than once to Asbury, "You have a home here that half those people up there would give dieir eyeteedi for!"

She had been once to die terrible place he lived in New York. They had gone up five flights of dark stone steps, past open garbage cans on every landing, to arrive finally at two damp rooms and **a** closet with a toilet in it. "You wouldn't live like this at home," she had muttered.

"No!" he'd said with an ecstatic look, "it wouldn't be possiblel"

She supposed the trudi was that she simply didn't understand how it felt to be sensitive or how peculiar you were when you **were** an artist. His sister said he was not an artist and that he had no talent and tiiat that was the trouble with him; but Mary George was not a happy girl herself. Asbury said she posed as an intellectual but that her I.Q. couldn't be over seventy-five, diat all she was really interested in was getting a man but diat no sensible man would finish a first look at her. She had tried to tell him that Mary George could be very attractive when she put her mind to it and he had said that that much strain on her mind would break her down. If she were in any way attractive, he had said, she wouldn't now be principal of a county elementary school, and Mary George had said that if

Asbury had had any talent, he would by now have published something. What had he ever published, she wanted to know, and for that matter, what had he ever written?

Mrs. Fox had pointed out that he was only twenty-five years old and Mary George had said that the age most people published something at was twenty-one, which made him exactly four years overdue. Mrs. Fox was not up on things like diat but she suggested that he might be writing a very *long* book. Very long book, her eye, Mary George said, he would do well if he came up with so much as a poem. Mrs. Fox hoped it wasn't going to be just a poem.

She pulled the car into the side drive and a scattering of guineas exploded into tiie air and sailed screaming around the house. "Home again, home again jiggity jig!" she said.

"Oh God," Asbury groaned. "The artist arrives at die gas chamber," Mary George said in her nasal voice.

He leaned on the door and got out, and forgetting his bags he moved toward the front of the house as if he were in a daze. His sister got out and stood by the car door, squinting at his bent unsteady figure. As she watched him go up the front steps, her moudi fell slack in her astonished face. "Why," she said, "there *is* something tiie matter with him. He looks a hundred years old."

"Didn't I tell you so?" her mother hissed. "Now you keep your moudi shut and let him alone."

He went into die house, pausing in die hall only long enough to see his pale broken face glare at him for an instant from die pier mirror. Holding onto die banister, he pulled himself up the steep stairs, across die landing and then up the shorter second flight and into his room, a large open airy room with a faded blue rug and white curtains freshly put up for his arrival. He looked at nothing, but fell face down on his own bed. It was a narrow antique bed with a high ornamental headboard on which was carved a garlanded basket overflowing with wooden fruit.

While he was still in New York, he had written a letter to hit mother which filled two notebooks. He did not mean it to be read until after his death. It was such a letter as Kafka had addressed to his father. Asbury's father had died twenty years ago and Asbury considered this a great blessing. The old man, he felt sure, had been one of the courthouse gang, a rural worthy witii a dirty finger in every pie and he knew he would not have been able to stomach him. He had read some of his correspondence and had been appalled by its stupidity.

He knew, of course, that his mother would not understand the letter at once. Her literal mind would require some time to discover the significance of it, but

he thought she would be able to see that he forgave her for all she had done to him. For that matter, he supposed that she would realize what she had done to him only through the letter. He didn't think she was conscious of it at all. Her self-satisfaction itself was barely conscious, but because of the letter, she might experience a painful realization and this would be the only thing of value he had to leave her.

If reading it would be painful to her, writing it had sometimes been unbearable to him—for in order to face her, he had had to face himself. "I came here to escape the slave's atmosphere of home," he had written, "to find freedom, to liberate my imagination, to take it like a hawk from its cage and set it 'whirling off into the widening gyre' (Yeats) and what did I find? It was incapable of flight. It was some bird you had domesticated, sitting huffy in its pen, refusing to come outl" The next words were underscored twice. "I have no imagination. I have no talent. I can't create. I have nothing but die desire for these tilings. Why didn't you kill tiiat too? Woman, why did you pinion me?"

Writing this, he had reached the pit of despair and he thought that reading it, she would at least begin to sense his tragedy and her part in it. It was not that she had ever forced her way on him. That had never been necessary. Her way had simply been the air he breathed and when at last he had found other air, he couldn't survive in it. He felt that even if she didn't understand at once, the letter would leave her with an enduring chill and perhaps in time lead her to see herself as she was.

He had destroyed everything else he had ever written—his two lifeless novels, his half-dozen stationary plays, his prosy poems, his sketchy short stories—and kept only the two notebooks that contained the letter. They were in the black suitcase that his sister, huffing and blowing, was now dragging up die second flight of stairs. His mother was carrying the smaller bag and came on ahead. He turned over as she entered the room.

"I'll open this and get out your things," she said, "and you can go right to bed and in a few minutes I'll bring your breakfast." He sat up and said in a fretful voice, "I don't want any breakfast and I can open my own suitcase. Leave diat alone."

His sister arrived in die door, her face full of curiosity, and let the black bag fall with a thud over the doorsill. Then she began to push it across the room with her foot until she was close enough to get a good look at him. "If I looked as bad as you do," she said, "I'd go to the hospital."

Her modier cut her eyes sharply at her and she left. Then Mrs. Fox closed the door and came to die bed and sat down on it beside him. "Now this time I want you to make a long visit and rest," she said.

"This visit," he said, "will be permanent."

"Wonderful!" she cried. "You can have a little studio in your room and in die mornings you can write plays and in die afternoons you can help in the dairy!"

He turned a white wooden face to her. "Close the blinds and let me sleep," he said.

When she was gone, he lay for some time staring at the water stains on the gray walls. Descending from the top molding, long icicle shapes had been etched by leaks and, directly over his bed on the ceiling, anodier leak had made a fierce bird widi spread wings. It had an icicle crosswise in its beak and there were smaller icicles depending from its wings and tail. It had been there since his childhood and had always irritated him and sometimes had frightened him. He had often had the illusion that it was in motion and about to descend mysteriously and set the icicle on his head. He closed his eyes and thought: I won't have to look at it for many more days. And presently he went to sleep.

When he woke up in the afternoon, there was a pink openmoudied face hanging over him and from two large familiar ears on either side of it the black tubes of Block's stethoscope extended down to his exposed chest. The doctor, seeing he was awake, made a face like a Chinaman, rolled his eyes almost out of his head and cried, "Say AHHHH!"

Block was irresistible to children. For miles around they vomited and went into fevers to have a visit from him. Mrs. Fox was standing behind him, smiling radiantly. "Here's Doctor Blockl" she said as if she had captured this angel on the rooftop and brought him in for her little boy.

"Get him out of here," Asbury muttered. He looked at die asinine face from what seemed the bottom of a black hole.

The doctor peered closer, wiggling his ears. Block was bald and had a round face as senseless as a baby's. Nothing about him indicated intelligence except two cold clinical nickel-colored eyes that hung widi a motionless curiosity over whatever he looked at. "You sho do look bad, Azzberry," he murmured. He took die stedioscope off and dropped it in his bag. "I don't know when I've seen anybody your age look as sorry as you do. What you been doing to yourself?"

There was a continuous thud in die back of Asbury's head as if his heart had got trapped in it and was fighting to get out. "I didn't send for you," he said.

Block put his hand on the glaring face and pulled the eyelid down and peered into it. "You must have been on the bum up diere," he said. He began to press his hand in the small of Asbury'i back. "I went up there once myself," he said, "and saw exactly how

little diey had and came straight on back home. Open your mouth."

Asbury opened it automatically and the drill-like gaze swung over it and bore down. He snapped it shut and in a wheezing breathless voice he said, "If I'd wanted a doctor, I'd have stayed up diere where I could have got a good one I" "Asburyl" his mother said.

"How long you been having die so' throat?" Block asked.

. "She sent for you!" Asbury said. "She can answer die questions."

"Asburyl" his mother said.

Block leaned over his bag and pulled out a rubber tube. He pushed Asbury's sleeve up and tied die tube around his upper arm. Then he took out a syringe and prepared to find die vein, humming a hymn as he pressed die needle in. Asbury lay witii a rigid outraged stare while die privacy of his blood was invaded by this idiot. "Slowly Lord but sure," Block sang in a murmuring voice, "Oh slowly Lord but sure." When the syringe was full, he witiidrew die needle. "Blood don't lie," he said. He poured it in a bottle and (topped it up and put die bottle in his bag. "Azzbury," he started, "how long . . ."

Asbury sat up and thrust his diudding head forward and said, "I didn't send for you. I'm not answering any questions. You're not my doctor. What's wrong widi me is way beyond you."

"Most tilings are beyond me," Block said. "I ain't found anything yet diat I dioroughly understood," and he sighed and got up. His eyes seemed to glitter at Asbury as if from a great distance.

"He wouldn't act so ugly," Mrs. Fox explained, "if he weren't really sick. And / want you to come back every day until you get him well."

Asbury's eyes were a fierce glaring violet. "What's wrong widi me is way beyond you," he repeated and lay back down and closed his eyes until Block and his modier were gone.

In die next few days, though he grew rapidly worse, his mind functioned widi a terrible clarity. On the point of death, he found himself existing in a state of illumination diat was totally out of keeping widi die kind of talk he had to listen to from his mother. This was largely about cows widi names like Daisy and Bessie Button and dieir intimate functions—dieir mastitis and dieir screw-worms and dieir abortions. His modier insisted diat in die middle of the day he get out and sit on die porch and "enjoy the view" and as resistance was too much of a struggle, he dragged himself out and **sat** there in a rigid slouch, his feet wrapped in an afghan and his hands gripped on the chair arms as if he were about to spring forward into the glaring china blue sky. The lawn extended for a quarter of an acre down to a barbed-wire fence that divided it from the front pasture. In

the middle of the day the dry cows rested there under a line of sweetgum trees. On the other side of die road were two hills with a pond between and his motlier could sit on the porch and watch die herd walk across die dam to the hill on the ouSer side. The whole scene was rimmed by a wall of trees which, at the time of day he was forced to sit there, was a washed-out blue that reminded him sadly of die Negroes' faded overalls.

He listened irritably while his mother detailed the faults of the help. "Those two are not stupid," she said. "They know how to look out for diemselves."

"They need to," he muttered, but there was no use to argue with her. Last year he had been writing a play about die Negro and he had wanted to be around them for a while to see how they really felt about tlieir condition, but the two who worked for her had lost all their initiative over die years. They didn't talk. The one called Morgan was light brown, part Indian; the other, older one, Randall, was very black and fat. When they said anything to him, it was as if they were speaking to an invisible body located to the right or left of where he actually was, and after two days working side by side widi them, he felt he had not established rapport. He decided to try something bolder than talk and one afternoon as he was standing near Randall, watching him adjust a milker, he had quiedy taken out his cigarettes and lit one. The Negro had stopped what he was doing and watched him. He waited until Asbury had taken two draws and then he said, "She don't 'low no smoking in here."

The other one approached and stood diere, grinning.

"I know it," Asbury said and after a deliberate pause, he shook the package and held it out, first to Randall, who took one, and tiien to Morgan, who took one. He had tlien lit the cigarettes for them himself and die three of them had stood diere smoking. There were no sounds but the steady click of the two milking machines and the occasional slap of a cow's tail against her side. It was one of those moments of communion when the difference between black and white is absorbed into nothing.

The next day two cans of milk had been returned from die creamery because it had absorbed the odor of tobacco. He took the **blame** and told his mother that it was he and not the Negroes who **had** been smoking. "If you were doing it, they were doing it," she **had** said. "Don't you think I know those two?" She was incapable of thinking them innocent; but the experience had so exhilarated him **that** he had been determined to repeat it in some other way.

The next afternoon when he and Randall were in the milk house pouring the fresh milk into the cans, he had picked up the **jelly** glass the Negroes drank out of and, inspired, had poured **himself** a glassful of the warm milk and drained it down. Randall had stopped pouring and had remained, half-bent, over the can,

watching him. "She don't 'low that," he said. "That *the* thing she don't **Tow."**

Asbury poured out another glassful and handed it to him.

"She don't 'low it," he repeated.

"Listen," Asbury said hoarsely, "the world is changing. There's no reason I shouldn't drink after you or you after me I" "She don't 'low noner us to drink noner this here milk," Randall **said.**

Asbury continued to hold the glass out to him. "You took the the cigarette," he said. "Take the milk. It's not going to hurt my mother to lose two or three glasses of milk a day. We've got to think free if we want to live free I"

The other one had come up and was standing in the door.

"Don't want noner that milk," Randall said.

Asbury swung around and held the glass out to Morgan. "Here boy, have a drink of this," he said. Morgan stared at him; then his face took on a decided look of cunning. "I ain't seen you drink none of it yourself," he said.

Asbury despised milk. The first warm glassful had turned his stomach. He drank half of what he was holding and handed the rest to the Negro, who took it and gazed down inside the glass as if it contained some great mystery; then he set it on the floor by the cooler.

"Don't you like milk?" Asbury asked.

"I likes it but I ain't drinking noner that."

"Why?"

"She don't 'low it," Morgan said.

"My God I" Asbury exploded, "she she she I" He had tried the same thing die next day and die next and the next but he could not get them to drink the milk. A few afternoons later when he was standing outside the milk house about to go in, he heard Morgan ask, "Howcome you let him drink that milk every day?"

"What he do is him," Randall said. "What I do is me."

"Howcome he talks so ugly about his ma?"

"She ain't whup him enough when he was little," Randall .said.

The insufferableness of life at home had overcome him and he had returned to New York two days early. So far as he was concerned he had died there, and the question now was how long he could stand to linger here. He could have hastened his end but suicide would not have been a victory. Deadi was coming to him legitimately, as a justification, as a gift from life. That was his greatest triumph. Then too, to die fine minds of die neighborhood, a suicide son would indicate a mother who had been a failure, and while diis was the case,

he felt that it was a public embarrassment he could spare her. What she would learn from the letter would be a private revelation. He had sealed the notebooks in a manila envelope and had written on it: "To be opened only after the death of Asbury Porter Fox." He had put the envelope in the desk drawer in his room and locked it and the key was in his pajama pocket until he could decide on a place to leave it.

When they sat on the porch in the morning, his mother felt that some of the time she should talk about subjects that were of interest to him. The diird morning she started in on his writing. "When you get well," she said, "I think it would be nice if you wrote a book about down here. We need anodier good book like

Gone With the Wind."

He could feel the muscles in his stomach begin to tighten.

"Put the war in it," she advised. "That always makes a long book."

He put his head back gently as if he were afraid it would crack. After a moment he said, "I am not going to write any book."

"Well," she said, "if you don't feel like writing a book, you could just write poems. They're nice." She realized that what he needed was someone intellectual to talk to, but Mary George was the only intellectual she knew and he would not talk to her. She had thought of Mr. Bush, the retired Methodist minister, but she had not brought this up. Now she decided to hazard it. "I think I'll ask Dr. Bush to come to see you," she said, raising Mr. Bush's rank. "You'd enjoy him. He collects rare coins."

She was not prepared for the reaction she got. He began to shake all over and give loud spasmodic laughs. He seemed about to choke. After a minute he subsided into a cough. "If you think I need spiritual aid to die," he said, "you're quite mistaken. And certainly pot from that ass Bush. My God!"

"I didn't mean that at all," she said. "He has coins dating from the time of Cleopatra." "Well if you ask him here, I'll tell him to go to hell," he said. "Bush I That beats all I"

"I'm glad something amuses you," she said acidly.

For a time they sat there in silence. Then his mother looked up. He was sitting forward again and smiling at her. His face was brightening more and more as if he had just had an idea that was brilliant. She stared at him. "I'll tell you who I want to come," he said. For the first time since he had come home, his expression was pleasant; though there was also, she thought, a kind of crafty look about him.

"Who do you want to come?" she asked suspiciously.

"I want a priest," he announced.

"A priest?" his mother said in an uncomprehending voice.

"Preferably a Jesuit," he said, brightening more and more. "Yes, by all means a Jesuit. They have them in the city. You can call up and get me one."

"What is the matter with you?" his mother asked.

"Most of them are very well-educated," he said, "but Jesuits are foolproof. A Jesuit would be able to discuss something besides the weather." Already, remembering Ignatius Vogle, S.J., he could picture the priest. This one would be a trifle more worldly perhaps, a trifle more cynical. Protected by their ancient institution, priests could afford to be cynical, to play both ends against the middle. He would talk to a man of culture before he died—even in this desert! Furthermore, nothing would irritate his mother so much. He could not understand why he had not thought of this sooner.

"You're not a member of that church," Mrs. Fox said shortly.
"It's twenty miles away. They wouldn't send one." She hoped **that** this would end die matter.

He sat back absorbed in the idea, determined to force her to **make** the call since she always did what he wanted if he kept at **her.** "I'm dying," he said, "and I haven't asked you to do but one **tiling** and you refuse me diat."

"You are NOT dying."

"When you realize it," he said, "it'll be too late."

There was another unpleasant silence. Presently his modier said, "Nowadays doctors don't *let* young people die. They give diem **some** of these new medicines." She began shaking her foot widi a nerve-rattling assurance. "People just don't die like diey used to," she **said.**

"Modier," he said, "you ought to be prepared. I think even **Block** knows and hasn't told you yet." Block, after die first visit, had come in grimly every time, without his jokes and funny faces, and **had** taken his blood in silence, his nickel-colored eyes unfriendly. He was, by definition, die enemy of deadi and he looked now as if **he** knew he was batding die real diing. He had said he wouldn't prescribe until he knew what was wrong and Asbury had laughed in **his** face. "Mother," he said, "I AM going to die," and he tried to **make** each word like a hammer blow on top of her head.

She paled slightly but she did not blink. "Do you diink for **one** minute," she said angrily, "diat I intend to sit here and let you die?" Her eyes were as hard as two old mountain ranges seen in **die** distance. He felt die first disdnct stroke of doubt.

"Do you?" she asked fiercely. "I don't think you have anything to do with it," he said in **a** shaken voice. "Humph," she said and got up and left the porch as if she

could not stand to be around such stupidity an instant longer.

Forgetting die Jesuit, he went rapidly over his symptoms: **his** fever had increased, interspersed by chills; he barely had die energy to drag himself out on die porch; food was abhorrent to him; **and** Block had not been able to give her die least sadsfacdon. Even **as** he sat diere, he felt die beginning of a new chill, as if deadi **were** already playfully rattling his bones. He pulled die afghan off **his** feet and put it around his shoulders and made his way unsteadily up die stairs to bed.

He continued to grow worse. In the next few days he became so **much** weaker and badgered her so constantly about the Jesuit that **finally** in desperation she decided to humor his foolishness. She **made** the call, explaining in a chilly voice that her son was ill, **perhaps** a little out of his head, and wished to speak to a priest. While **she** made the call, Asbury hung over the banisters, barefooted, with **the** afghan around him, and listened. When she hung up he called **down** to know when the priest was coming.

"Tomorrow sometime," his mother said irritably.

He could tell by the fact that she made die call that her assurance **was** beginning to shatter. Whenever she let Block in or out, there **was** much whispering in the downstairs hall. That evening, he **heard** her and Mary George talking in low voices in die parlor. He drought he heard his name and he got up and tiptoed into die **hall** and down the first three steps until he could hear the voices distinctly.

"I had to call diat priest," his mother was saying. "I'm afraid diis is serious. I diought it was just a nervous breakdown but now I **think** it's something real. Doctor Block thinks it's something real **too** and whatever it is is worse because he's so run-down."

"Grow up, Mamma," Mary George said, "I've told you and I tell **you** again: what's wrong widi him is purely psychosomatic." There was nodiing she was not an expert on.

"No," his mother said, "it's a real disease. The doctor says so." He thought he detected a crack in her voice.

"Block is an idiot," Mary George said. "You've got to face die **facts:** Asbury can't write so he gets sick. He's going to be an invalid instead of an artist. Do you know what he needs?"

"No," his modier said.

"Two or three shock treatments," Mary George said. "Get that artist business out of his head once and for all." His modier gave a little cry and he grasped die banister. "Mark my words," his sister continued, "all he's going to be

around here for die next fifty years is a decoration."

He went back to bed. In a sense she was right. He had failed his **god,** Art, but he had been a faidiful servant and Art was sending **him** Deadi. He had seen this from die first with a kind of mystical clarity. He went to sleep thinking of the peaceful spot in die family burying ground where he would soon lie, and after a while he saw that his body was being borne slowly toward it while his mother and Mary George watched without interest from their chairs on the porch. As the bier was carried across the dam, they could look up and see the procession reflected upside down in the pond. A lean dark figure in a Roman collar followed it. He had a mysteriously saturnine face in which there was a subtle blend of asceticism and corruption. Asbury was laid in a shallow grave on the hillside and die indistinct mourners, after standing in silence for a while, spread out over the darkening green. The Jesuit retired to a spot beneadi a dead tree to smoke and meditate. The moon came up and Asbury was aware of a presence bending over him and a gentk warmth on his cold face. He knew that this was Art come to wake him and he sat up and opened his eyes. Across the hill all die lights were on in his mother's house. The black pond was speckled widi little nickel-colored stars. The Jesuit had disappeared. All around him the cows were spread out grazing in the moonlight and one large white one, violently spotted, was softly licking his head as if it were a block of salt. He awoke with a shudder and discovered that his bed was soaking from a night sweat and as he sat shivering in the dark, he realized that the end was not many days distant. He gazed down into the crater of death and fell back dizzy on his pillow.

The next day his mother noted something almost ethereal about his ravaged face. He looked like one of diose dying children who must have Christmas early. He sat up in the bed and directed die rearrangement of several chairs and had her remove a picture of a maiden chained to a rock for he knew it would make die Jesuit smile. He had the comfortable rocker taken away and when he finished, the room with its severe wall stains had a certain cell-like quality. He felt it would be attractive to the visitor.

All morning he waited, looking irritably up at die ceiling where the bird with the icicle in its beak seemed poised and waiting too; but the priest did not arrive until late in the afternoon. As soon ai his mother opened the door, a loud unintelligible voice began to boom in the downstairs hall. Asbury's heart beat wildly. In a second there was a heavy creaking on the stairs. Then almost at once his mother, her expression constrained, came in followed by **a** massive old man

who plowed straight across the room, picked up **a** chair by the side of the bed and put it under himself.

"I'm Fadier Finn—from Purrgatory," he said in a hearty voice. He **had** a large red face, a stiff brush of gray hair and was blind in one **eye,** but the good eye, blue and clear, was focused sharply on As-**bury.** There was a grease spot on his vest. "So you want to talk to **a** priest?" he said. "Very wise. None of us knows the hour Our Blessed Lord may call us." Then he cocked his good eye up at Asbury's modier and said, "Thank you, you may leave us now."

Mrs. Fox stiffened and did not budge.

"I'd like to talk to Fadier Finn alone," Asbury said, feeling suddenly diat here he had an ally, akhough he had not expected a priest like tJiis one. His mother gave him a disgusted look and left **the** room. He knew she would go no farther than just outside die **door.**

"It's so nice to have you come," Asbury said. "This place is incredibly dreary. There's no one here an intelligent person can talk **to.** I wonder what you think of Joyce, Father?"

The priest lifted his chair and pushed closer. "You'll have to **shout,"** he said. "Blind in one eye and deaf in one ear."

"What do you diink of Joyce?" Asbury said louder.

"Joyce? Joyce who?" asked the priest.

"James Joyce," Asbury said and laughed.

The priest brushed his huge hand in the air as if he were bothered **by** gnats. "I haven't met him," he said. "Now. Do you say your **morning** and night prayers?" Asbury appeared confused. "Joyce was a great writer," he **murmured,** forgetting to shout.

"You don't eh?" said die priest. "Well you will never learn to be **good** unless you pray regularly. You cannot love Jesus unless you **ipeak** to Him."

"The mydi of die dying god has always fascinated me," Asbury shouted, but the priest did not appear to catch it.

"Do you have trouble widi purity?" he demanded, and as Asbury **paled,** he went on without waiting for an answer. "We all do but **you** must pray to the Holy Ghost for it. Mind, heart and body.

Nothing is overcome without prayer. Pray with your family. Do you pray with your family?" "God forbid," Asbury murmured. "My mother doesn't have time

to pray and my sister is an atheist," he shouted. "A shame!" said the priest. "Then you must pray for them." "The artist prays by creating," Asbury ventured. "Not enough!" snapped the priest. "If you do not pray daily, you are neglecting your immortal soul. Do you know your catechism?"

"Certainly not," Asbury muttered. "Who made you?" the priest asked in a martial tone. "Different people believe different things about that," Asbury said. "God made you," the priest said shortly. "Who is God?" "God is an idea created by man," Asbury said, feeling that he was getting into stride, that two could play at tliis. "God is a spirit infinitely perfect," the priest said. "You are a very ignorant boy. Why did God make you?" "God didn't. . . ." "God made you to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him in the next I" the old priest said in a battering voice. "If you don't apply yourself to the catechism how do you expect to know how to save your immortal soul?"

Asbury saw he had made a mistake and that it was time to get rid of the old fool. "Listen," he said, "I'm not a Roman." "A poor excuse for not saying your prayers!" the old man snorted. Asbury slumped slightly in the bed. "I'm dying," he shouted. "But you're not dead yet!" said the priest, "and how do you expect to meet God face to face when you've never spoken to Him? How do you expect to get what you don't ask for? God does not send the Holy Ghost to those who don't ask for Him. Ask Him to send the Holy Ghost."

"The Holy Ghost?" Asbury said. "Are you so ignorant you've never heard of the Holy Ghost?" the priest asked. "Certainly I've heard of the Holy Ghost," Asbury said furiously, "and the Holy Ghost is the last thing I'm looking for!" "And He may be the last thing you get," the priest said, his **one** fierce eye inflamed. "Do you want your soul to suffer eternal damnation? Do you want to be deprived of God for all eternity? Do you want to suffer the most terrible pain, greater than fire, the pain of loss? Do you want to suffer the pain of loss for all eternity?"

Asbury moved his arms and legs helplessly as if he were pinned to the bed by the terrible eye.

"How can the Holy Ghost fill your soul when it's full of trash?" the priest roared. "The Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are—a lazy ignorant conceited youth!" he said, pounding his fist on the little bedside table.

Mrs. Fox burst in. "Enough of this!" she cried. "How dare you talk that way to a poor sick boy? You're upsetting him. You'll have to go."

"The poor lad doesn't even know his catechism," the priest said, rising. "I should think you would have taught him to say his daily prayers. You have neglected your duty as his mother." He turned back to the bed and said affably, "I'll give you my blessing and after this you must say your daily prayers without

fail," whereupon he put his hand on Asbury's head and rumbled something in Latin. "Call me any time," he said, "and we can have another little chat," and then he followed Mrs. Fox's rigid back out. The last thing Asbury heard him say was, "He's a good lad at heart but very ignorant."

When his mother had got rid of the priest she came rapidly up the steps again to say that she had told him so, but when she saw him, pale and drawn and ravaged, sitting up in his bed, staring in front of him with large childish shocked eyes, she did not have the heart and went rapidly out again.

The next morning he was so weak that she made up her mind he must go to the hospital. "I'm not going to any hospital," he kept repeating, turning his thudding head from side to side as if he wanted to work it loose from his body. "I'm not going to any hospital as long as I'm conscious." He was dunking bitterly mat once he lost consciousness, she could drag him off to the hospital and fill him full of blood and prolong his misery for days. He was convinced that the end was approaching, that it would be today, and he was tormented now dunking of his useless life. He felt as if he were a shell that had to be filled with something but he did not know what. He began to take note of everything in the room as if for the last time—the ridiculous antique furniture, die pattern in the rug, die silly picture his modier had replaced. He even looked at die fierce bird with die icicle in its beak and felt tliat it was diere for some purpose that he could not divine.

There was something he was searching for, somediing that he felt he must have, some last significant culminating experience that he must make for himself before he died—make for himself out of his own intelligence. He had always relied on himself and had never been a sniveler after die ineffable.

Once when Mary George was tiiirteen and he was five, she had lured him witli die promise of an unnamed present into a large tent full of people and had dragged him backwards up to die front where a man in a blue suit and red and white tie was standing. "Here," she said in a loud voice. "I'm already saved but you can save him. He's a real stinker and too big for his britches." He had broken her grip and shot out of there like a small cur and later when he had asked for his present, she had said, "You would have got Salvation if you had waited for it but since you acted die way you did, you get nothing I"

As die day wore on, he grew more and more frantic for fear he would die widiout making some last meaningful experience for himself. His modier sat anxiously by die side of die bed. She had called Block twice and could not get him. He diought even now she had not realized diat he was going to die, much less diat die end was only hours off.

The light in die room was beginning to have an odd quality, almost as if it were taking on presence. In a darkened form it entered and seemed to wait.

Outside it appeared to move no farther dian die edge of the faded treeline, which he could see a few inches over die sill of his window. Suddenly he thought of diat experience of communion diat he had had in die dairy widi die Negroes when diey had smoked togedier, and at once he began to tremble with excitement. They would smoke togedier one last time.

After a moment, turning his head on die pillow, he said, "Motiier,

I want to tell die Negroes good-bye."

His modier paled. For an instant her face seemed about to fly apart. Then die line of her mouth hardened; her brows drew together. "Good-bye?" she said in a flat voice. "Where are you going?"

For a few seconds he only looked at her. Then he said, "I think you know. Get them. I don't have long."

"This is absurd," she muttered but she got up and hurried out. He heard her try to reach Block again before she went outside. He thought her clinging to Block at a time like this was touching and pathetic. He waited, preparing himself for the encounter as a religious man might prepare himself for the last sacrament. Presently he heard their steps on the stair.

"Here's Randall and Morgan," his mother said, ushering them in. "They've come to tell you hello."

The two of them came in grinning and shuffled to the side of the bed. They stood there, Randall in front and Morgan behind. "You sho do look well," Randall said. "You looks very well."

"You looks well," die other one said. "Yessuh, you looks fine."

"I ain't ever seen you looking so well before," Randall said.

"Yes, doesn't he look well?" his mother said. "I think he looks just fine."

"Yessuh," Randall said, "1 speck you ain't even sick." "Mother," Asbury said in a forced voice. "I'd like to talk to them

alone."

His mother stiffened; then she marched out. She walked across the hall and into the room on the other side and sat down. Through the open doors he could see her begin to rock in little short jerks. The two Negroes looked as if their last protection had dropped away.

Asbury's head was so heavy he could not think what he had been going to do. "I'm dying," he said.

Both their grins became gelid. "You looks fine," Randall said.

"I'm going to die," Asbury repeated. Then with relief he remembered diat diey were going to smoke together. He reached for die package on die table and held it out to Randall, forgetting to shake out die cigarettes.

The Negro took die package and put it in his pocket. "I thank you," he said. "I certainly do prechate it." Asbury stared as if he had forgotten again. After a second he

became aware that the other Negro's face had turned infinitely sad; then he realized that it was not sad but sullen. He fumbled in the drawer of the table and pulled out an unopened package and thrust it at Morgan.

"I thanks you, Mist Asbury," Morgan said, brightening. "You certly does look well." "I'm about to die," Asbury said irritably. "You looks fine," Randall said. "You be up and around in a few days," Morgan predicted. Neither of them seemed to find a suitable place to rest his gaze. Asbury looked wildly across the hall where his modier had her rocker turned so that her back faced him. It was apparent she had no intention of getting rid of them for him.

"I speck you might have a little cold," Randall said after a time. "I takes a little turpentine and sugar when I has a cold," Morgan said. "Shut your mouth," Randall said, turning on him. "Shut your own mouth," Morgan said. "I know what I takes." "He don't take what you take," Randall growled. "Mother!" Asbury called in a shaking voice. His mother stood up. "Mister Asbury has had company long enough now," she called. "You all can come back tomorrow." "We be going," Randall said. "You sho do look well." "You sho does," Morgan said. They filed out agreeing with each other how well he looked **but** Asbury's vision became blurred before they reached the hall. For an instant he saw his mother's form as if it were a shadow in the door and then it disappeared after them down the stairs. He heard **her** call Block again but he heard it without interest. His head was spinning. He knew now there would be no significant experience before he died. There was nothing more to do but give her the key to the drawer where the letter was, and wait for the end.

He sank into a heavy sleep from which he awoke about **five** o'clock to see her white face, very small, at the end of a well of darkness. He took the key out of his pajama pocket and handed it to her and mumbled that there was a letter in the desk to be opened when he was gone, but she did not seem to understand. She **put** the key down on the bedside table and left it there and he returned to his dream in which two large boulders were circling each other inside his head.

He awoke a little after six to hear Block's car stop below in the driveway. The sound was like a summons, bringing him rapidly and with a clear head out of his sleep. He had a sudden terrible foreboding that the fate awaiting him was going to be more shattering than any he could have reckoned on. He lay absolutely

motionless, as still as an animal the instant before an earthquake.

Block and his mother talked as they came up the stairs but he did not distinguish their words. The doctor came in making faces; his mother was smiling. "Guess what you've got, Sugarpiel" she cried. Her voice broke in on him with the force of a gunshot.

"Found theter ol' bug, did ol' Block," Block said, sinking down into the chair by the bed. He raised his hands over his head in the gesture of a victorious prize fighter and let them collapse in his lap as if the effort had exhausted him. Then he removed a red bandanna handkerchief that he carried to be funny with and wiped his face thoroughly, having a different expression on it every time it appeared from behind the rag.

"I think you're just as smart as you can be!" Mrs. Fox said. "Asbury," she said, "you have undulant fever. It'll keep coming back but it won't kill you!" Her smile was as bright and intense as a lightbulb without a shade. "I'm so relieved," she said.

Asbury sat up slowly, his face expressionless; then he fell back down again.

Block leaned over him and smiled. "You ain't going to die," he said, with deep satisfaction.

Nothing about Asbury stirred except his eyes. They did not appear to move on the surface but somewhere in their blurred depths there was an almost imperceptible motion as if something were struggling feebly. Block's gaze seemed to reach down like a steel pin and hold whatever it was until the life was out of it. "Undulant fever ain't so bad, Azzberry," he murmured. "It's the same as Bang's in a cow."

The boy gave a low moan and then was quiet.

"He must have drunk some unpasteurized milk up there," his mother said softly and dien the two of them tiptoed out as if they thought he were about to go to sleep.

When the sound of their footsteps had faded on the stairs, As-bury sat up again. He turned his head, almost surreptitiously, to the side where the key he had given his mother was lying on the bedside table. His hand shot out and closed over it and returned it to his pocket. He glanced across the room into the small oval-framed dresser mirror. The eyes that stared back at him were the same that had returned his gaze every day from that mirror but it seemed to him that they were paler. They looked shocked clean as if they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him. He shuddered and turned his head quickly the odier way and stared out the window. A blinding red-gold sun moved serenely from under a purple cloud. Below it the treeline was black against the

crimson sky. It formed a brittle wall, standing as if it were the frail defense he had set up in his mind to protect him from what was coming. The boy fell back on his pillow and stared at the ceiling. His limbs that had been racked for so many weeks by fever and chill were numb now. The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the coming of new. It was then that he felt the beginning of a chill, a chill so peculiar, so light, that it was like a warm ripple across a deeper sea of cold. His bream came short. The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and die days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion, was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes. He saw that for the rest of his days, frail, racked, but enduring, he would live in the face of a purifying terror. A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend.

The Comforts of Home

THOMAS withdrew to the side of the window and with his head between die wall and die curtain he looked down on the driveway where die car had stopped. His modier and die little slut were getting out of it. His mother emerged slowly, stolid and awkward, and dien die little slut's long slightly bowed legs slid **out,** die dress pulled above die knees. With a shriek of laughter she ran to meet die dog, who bounded, overjoyed, shaking widi pleasure, to welcome her. Rage gathered diroughout Thomas's large frame with a silent ominous intensity, like a mob assembling. It was now up to him to pack a suitcase, go to the hotel, and stay diere until die house should be cleared. He did not know where a suitcase was, he disliked to pack, he needed his books, his typewriter was not portable, he was used to an electric blanket, he could not bear to eat in restaurants. His mother, with her daredevil charity, was about to wreck the peace of the house. The back door slammed and die girl's laugh shot up from die kitchen, through the back hall, up the stairwell and into his room, making for him like a bolt of electricity. He jumped to die side **and** stood glaring about him. His words of die morning had been unequivocal: "If you bring that girl back into diis house, I leave. You can choose—her or me." She had made her choice. An intense pain gripped his diroat. It was the first time in his diirty-five years . . . He felt a sudden **burning** moisture behind his eyes. Then he steadied himself, overcome by rage. On the contrary: she had not made any choice. She **was** counting on his attachment to his electric blanket. She would **have** to be shown.

The girl's laughter rang upward a second time and Thomas winced. He saw again her look of the night before. She had invaded his room. He had waked to find his door open and her in it. There was enough light from the hall to make her visible as she turned toward him. The face was like a comedienne's in a musical comedy —a pointed chin, wide apple cheeks and feline empty eyes. He had sprung out of his bed and snatched a straight chair and then he had backed her out the door, holding the chair in front of him like an animal trainer driving out a dangerous cat. He had driven her silently down the hall, pausing when he reached it to beat on his mother's door. The girl, with a gasp, turned and fled into the guest room.

In a moment his modier had opened her door and peered out apprehensively. Her face, greasy with whatever she put on it at night, was framed in pink rubber curlers. She looked down the hall where die girl had disappeared. Thomas stood

before her, the chair still lifted in front of him as if he were about to quell another beast. "She tried to get in my room," he hissed, pushing in. "I woke up and she was trying to get in my room." He closed the door behind him and his voice rose in outrage. "I won't put up with this! I won't put up with it another day!"

His mother, backed by him to her bed, sat down on the edge of it. She had a heavy body on which sat a dun, mysteriously gaunt and incongruous head.

"I'm telling you for the last time," Thomas said, "I won't put up with this another day." There was -an observable tendency in all of her actions. This was, with the best intentions in the world, to make a mockery of virtue, to pursue it with such a mindless intensity that everyone involved was made a fool of and virtue itself became ridiculous. "Not another day," he repeated.

His mother shook her head emphatically, her eyes still on the door.

Thomas put the chair on the floor in front of her and sat down on it. He leaned forward as if he were about to explain something to a defective child.

"That's just another way she's unfortunate," his mother said.

"So awful, so awful. She told me the name of it but I forget what it is but it's something she can't help. Something she was born with. Thomas," she said and put her hand to her jaw, "suppose it were you?"

Exasperation blocked his windpipe. "Can't I make you see," he croaked, "that if she can't help herself you can't help her?"

His mother's eyes, intimate but untouchable, were the blue of great distances after sunset. "Nimpermaniac," she murmured.

"Nymphomaniac," he said fiercely. "She doesn't need to supply you with any fancy names. She's a moral moron. That's all you need to know. Born without the moral faculty—like somebody else would be born without a kidney or a leg. Do you understand?"

"I keep thinking it might be you," she said, her hand still on her jaw. "If it were you, how do you think I'd feel if nobody took you in? What if you were a nimpermaniac and not a brilliant smart person and you did what you couldn't help and . . ."

Thomas felt a deep unbearable loadiing for himself as if he were turning slowly into the girl.

"What did she have on?" she asked abruptly, her eyes narrowing.

"Nothing!" he roared. "Now will you get her out of here I"

"How can I turn her out in the cold?" she said. "This morning she was threatening to kill herself again." "Send her back to jail," Thomas said. "I would

not send *you* back to jail, Thomas," she said. He got up and snatched the chair and fled the room while he

was still able to control himself.

Thomas loved his modier. He loved her because it was his nature to do so, but there were times when he could not endure her love for him. There were times when it became nothing but pure idiot mystery and he sensed about him forces, invisible currents entirely out of his control. She proceeded always from the tritest of considerations—it was the *nice thing to do*—into the most foolhardy engagements with the devil, whom, of course, she never recognized.

The devil for Thomas was only a manner of speaking, but it was a manner appropriate to the situations his mother got into. Had she been in any degree intellectual, he could have proved to her from early Christian history that no excess of virtue is justified, that a moderation of good produces likewise a moderation in evil, that if Antony of Egypt had stayed at home and attended to his sister, no devils would have plagued him.

Thomas was not cynical and so far from being opposed to virtue, he saw it as die principle of order and die only thing diat makes life bearable. His own life was made bearable by the fruits of his modier's saner virtues—by the well-regulated house she kept and die excellent meals she served. But when virtue got out of hand widi her, as now, a sense of devils grew upon him, and dicse were not mental quirks in himself or die old lady, diey were denizens widi personalities, present though not visible, who might any moment be expected to shriek or rattle a pot.

The girl had landed in the county jail a month ago on a bad check charge and his modier had seen her picture in die paper. At die breakfast table she had gazed at it for a long time and then had passed it over die coffee pot to him. "Imagine," she said, "only nineteen years old and in diat filthy jail. And she doesn't look like a bad girl."

Thomas glanced at die picture. It showed die face of a shrewd ragamuffin. He observed diat die average age for criminality was steadily lowering.

"She looks like a wholesome girl," his modier said.

"Wholesome people don't pass bad checks," Thomas said.

"You don't know what you'd do in a pinch."

"I wouldn't pass a bad check," Thomas said.

"I think," his modier said, "I'll take her a little box of candy."

If then and there he had put his foot down, nothing else would have happened. His father, had he been living, would have put his foot down at that point. Taking a box of candy was her favorite nice diing to do. When anyone within her social

station moved to town, she called and took a box of candy; when any of her friend's children had babies or won a scholarship, she called and took a **box** of candy; when an old person broke his hip, she was at his bedside widi a box of candy. He had been amused at die idea of **her** taking a box of candy to die jail.

He stood now in his room widi die girl's laugh rocketing **away** in his head and cursed his amusement.

When his mother returned from the visit to the jail, she had burst into his study without knocking and had collapsed full-length on his couch, lifting her small swollen feet up on the arm of it. After a moment, she recovered herself enough to sit up and put a newspaper under them. Then she fell back again. "We don't know how the other half lives," she said.

Thomas knew that though her conversation moved from cliche to cliche there were real experiences behind them. He was less sorry for the girl's being in jail than for his mother having to see her there. He would have spared her all unpleasant sights. "Well," he said and put away his journal, "you had better forget it now. The girl has ample reason to be in jail."

"You can't imagine what all she's been through," she said, sitting up again, "listen." The poor girl, Star, had been brought up by a stepmother with three children of her own, one an almost grown boy who had taken advantage of her in such dreadful ways that she had been forced to run away and find her real mother. Once found, her real mother had sent her to various boarding schools to get rid of her. At each of these she had been forced to run away by the presence of perverts and sadists so monstrous that their acts defied description. Thomas could tell that his mother had not been spared the details that she was sparing him. Now and again when she spoke vaguely, her voice shook and he could tell that she was remembering some horror that had been put to her graphically. He had hoped that in a few days the memory of all this would wear off, but it did not. The next day she returned to the jail with Kleenex and cold-cream and a few days later, she announced that she had consulted a lawyer.

It was at these times that Thomas truly mourned the death of his father though he had not been able to endure him in life. The old **man** would have had none of this foolishness. Untouched by useless compassion, he would (behind her back) have pulled the necessary strings with his crony, the sheriff, and the girl would have been packed off to the state penitentiary to serve her time. He **had** always been engaged in some enraged action until one morning **when** (with an angry glance at his wife as if she alone were responsible) he had dropped dead at the breakfast table. Thomas had inherited his father's reason without his ruthlessness and his mother's love of good without her tendency to pursue it. His plan for all practical action was to wait and see what developed.

The lawyer found that the story of the repeated atrocities was for die most part untrue, but when he explained to her that the girl was a psychopathic personality, not insane enough for the asylum, not criminal enough for the jail, not stable enough for society, Thomas's mother was more deeply affected than ever. The girl readily admitted that her story was untrue on account of her being a congenital liar; she lied, she said, because she was insecure. She had passed through the hands of several psychiatrists who had put die finishing touches to her education. She knew there was no hope for her. In die presence of such an affliction as this, his mother seemed bowed down by some painful mystery diat nothing would make endurable but a redoubling of effort. To his annoyance, she appeared to look on *him* widi compassion, as if her hazy charity no longer made distinctions.

A few days later she burst in and said that die lawyer had got die girl paroled—to her.

Thomas rose from his Morris chair, dropping the review he had been reading. His large bland face contracted in anticipated pain. "You are not," he said, "going to bring that girl here I"

"No, no," she said, "calm yourself, Thomas." She had managed widi difficulty to get die girl a job in a pet shop in town and a place to board widi a crotchety old lady of her acquaintance. People were not kind. They did not put themselves in the place of some one like Star who had everything against her.

Thomas sat down again and retrieved his review. He seemed just to have escaped some danger which he did not care to make clear to himself. "Nobody can tell you anything," he said, "but in a few days diat girl will have left town, having got what she could out of you. You'll never hear from her again."

Two nights later he came home and opened die parlor door and was speared by a shrill depdiless laugh. His mother and the girl sat close to the fireplace where the gas logs were lit. The girl gave the immediate impression of being physically crooked. Her hair was cut like a dog's or an elf's and she was dressed in die latest

fashion. She was training on him a long familiar sparkling stare that turned after a second into an intimate grin.

"Thomas!" his mother said, her voice firm with the injunction not to bolt, "this is Star you've heard so much about. Star is going to have supper with us."

The girl called herself Star Drake. The lawyer had found that her real name was Sarah Ham.

Thomas neither moved nor spoke but hung in the door in what seemed a savage perplexity. Finally he said, "How do you do, Sarah," in a tone of such loathing that he was shocked at the sound of it. He reddened, feeling it beneath him to show contempt for any creature so pathetic. He advanced into the room, determined at least on a decent politeness and sat down heavily in a straight chair.

"Thomas writes history," his mother said with a threatening look at him. "He's president of the local Historical Society this year." The girl leaned forward and gave Thomas an even more pointed attention. "FabulousI" she said in a throaty voice. "Right now Thomas is writing about the first settlers in this county," his mother said.

"Fabulous!" the girl repeated.

Thomas by an effort of will managed to look as if he were alone in the room. "Say, you know who he looks like?" Star asked, her head on one side, taking him in at an angle.

"Oh, someone very distinguished!" his mother said archly.

"This cop I saw in the movie I went to last night," Star said.

"Star," his mother said, "I think you ought to be careful about the kind of movies you go to. I think you ought to see only the best ones. I don't think crime stories would be good for you."

"Oh this was a crime-does-not-pay," Star said, "and I swear this cop looked exactly like him. They were always putting something over on the guy. He would look like he couldn't stand it a minute longer or he would blow up. He was a riot. And not bad looking," she added with an appreciative leer at Thomas.

"Star," his mother said, "I think it would be grand if you developed a taste for music."

Thomas sighed. His mother rattled on and the girl, paying no attention to her, let her eyes play over him. The quality of her look was such that it might have been her hands, resting now on his knees, now on his neck. Her eyes had a mocking glitter and he knew that she was well aware he could not stand the sight of her. He needed nothing to tell him he was in the presence of die very stuff of corruption, but blameless corruption because there was no responsible faculty

behind it. He was looking at the most unendurable form of innocence. Absently he asked himself what the attitude of God was to this, meaning if possible to adopt it.

His mother's behavior throughout the meal was so idiotic that he could barely stand to look at her and since he could less stand to look at Sarah Ham, he fixed on die sideboard across die room a continuous gaze of disapproval and disgust. Every remark of the girl's his mother met as if it deserved serious attention. She advanced several plans for the wholesome use of Star's spare time. Sarah Ham paid no more attention to diis advice than if it came from a parrot. Once when Thomas inadvertently looked in her direction, she winked. As soon as he had swallowed die last spoonful of dessert, he rose and muttered, "I have to go, I have a meeting."

"Thomas," his mother said, "I want you to take Star home on your way. I don't want her riding in taxis by herself at night."

For a moment Thomas remained furiously silent. Then he turned and left the room. Presently he came back widi a look of obscure determination on his face. The -girl was ready, meekly waiting at the parlor door. She cast up at him a great look of admiration and confidence. Thomas did not offer his arm but she took it anyway and moved out of the house and down the steps, attached to what might have been a miraculously moving monument.

"Be good!" his mother called.

Sarah Ham snickered and poked him in the ribs.

While getting his coat he had decided that diis would be his opportunity to tell the girl that unless she ceased to be a parasite on his mother, he would see to it, personally, that she was returned to jail. He would let her know that he understood what she was up to, that he was not an innocent and that there were certain things he would not put up with. At his desk, pen in hand, none was more articulate than Thomas. As soon as he found himself shut into the car with Sarah Ham, terror seized his tongue.

She curled her feet up under her and said, "Alone at last," and giggled.

Thomas swerved the car away from the house and drove fast toward the gate. Once on the highway, he shot forward as if he were being pursued.

"Jesus!" Sarah Ham said, swinging her feet off the seat, "where's the fire?"

Thomas did not answer. In a few seconds he could feel her edging closer. She stretched, eased nearer, and finally hung her hand limply over his shoulder. "Tomsee doesn't like me," she said, "but I think he's fabulously cute."

Thomas covered the three and a half miles into town in a little over four minutes. The light at the first intersection was red but he ignored it. The old woman lived three blocks beyond. When the car screeched to a halt at the place,

he jumped out and ran around to the girl's door and opened it. She did not move from the car and Thomas was obliged to wait. After a moment one leg emerged, then her small white crooked face appeared and stared up at him. There was something about the look of it that suggested blindness but it was the blindness of those who don't know that they cannot see. Thomas was curiously sickened. The empty eyes moved over him. "Nobody likes me," she said in a sullen tone. "What if you were me and I couldn't stand to ride you three miles?"

"My mother likes you," he muttered. "Her!" the girl said. "She's just about seventy-five years behind the times!"

Breathlessly Thomas said, "If I find you bothering her again, I'll have you put back in jail." There was a dull force behind his voice though it came out barely above a whisper.

"You and who else?" she said and drew back in the car as if now she did not intend to get out at all. Thomas reached into it, blindly grasped the front of her coat, pulled her out by it and released her. Then he lunged back to the car and sped off. The other door was still hanging open and her laugh, bodiless but real,bounded up the street as if it were about to jump in die open side of the car and ride away with him. He reached over and slammed the door and then drove toward home, too angry to attend his meeting. He intended to make his modier well-aware of his displeasure. He intended to leave no doubt in her mind. The voice of his father rasped in his head.

Numbskull, the old man said, put your foot down now. Show her who's boss before she shows you. But when Thomas reached home, his mother, wisely, had gone to bed.

The next morning he appeared at the breakfast table, his brow lowered and die thrust of his jaw indicating diat he was in a dangerous humor. When he intended to be determined, Thomas began like a bull diat, before charging, backs widi his head lowered and paws the ground. "All right now listen," he began, yanking out his chair and sitting down, "I have somediing to say to you about that girl and I don't intend to say it but once." He drew breatJi. "She's nothing but a little slut. She makes fun of you behind your back. She means to get everything she can out of you and you are nodiing to her."

His mother looked as if she too had spent a restless night. She did not dress in die morning but wore her badirobe and a gray turban around her head, which gave her face a disconcerting omniscient look. He might have been breakfasting widi a sibyl.

"You'll have to use canned cream this morning," she said, pouring his coffee. "I forgot the odier."

"All right, did you hear me?" Thomas growled.

"I'm not deaf," his modier said and put die pot back on die trivet. "I know I'm nothing but an old bag of wind to her."

"Then why do you persist in diis foolhardy . . ."

"Thomas," she said, and put her hand to die side of her face, "it might be . . ."

"It is not me!" Thomas said, grasping the table leg at his knee.

She continued to hold her face, shaking her head slightly. "Think of all you have," she began. "All the comforts of home. And morals, Thomas. No bad inclinations, nothing bad you were born with."

Thomas began to breathe like someone who feels the onset of asthma. "You are not logical," he said in a limp voice. *"He* would have put his foot down."

The old lady stiffened. "You," she said, "are not like him."

Thomas opened his mouth silently.

"However," his mother said, in a tone of such subtle accusation that she might have been taking back the compliment, "I won't invite her back again since you're so dead set against her." "I am not set against her," Thomas said. "I am set against your making a fool of yourself."

As soon as he left die table and closed the door of his study on himself, his father took up a squatting position in his mind. The old man had had the countryman's ability to converse squatting, though he was no countryman but had been born and brought up in tiie city and only moved to a smaller place later to exploit his talents. With steady skill he had made them think him one of them. In die midst of a conversation on the courtiiouse lawn, he would squat and his two or diree companions would squat witii him with no break in the surface of the talk. By gesture he had lived his lie; he had never deigned to tell one.

Let her run over you, he said. You ain't like me. Not enough to be a man.

Thomas began vigorously to read and presently the image faded. The girl had caused a disturbance in the depths of his being, somewhere out of the reach of his power of analysis. He felt as if he had seen a tornado pass a hundred yards away and had an intimation that it would turn again and head directly for him. He did not get his mind firmly on his work until mid-morning.

Two nights later, his mother and he were sitting in the den after their supper, each reading a section of the evening paper, when the telephone began to ring witii the brassy intensity of a fire alarm. Thomas reached for it. As soon as *the* receiver was in his hand, a shrill female voice screamed into the room, "Come get diis girl! Come get her! Drunk! Drunk in my parlor and I won't have it!

Lost her job and come back here drunk I I won't have it I"

His mother leapt up and snatched the receiver.

The ghost of Thomas's father rose before him. Call the sheriff, the old man prompted. "Call the sheriff," Thomas said in a loud voice. "Call the sheriff to go there and pick her up."

"We'll be right there," his mother was saying. "We'll come and get her right away. Tell her to get her things together."

"She ain't in no condition to get nothing together," die voice screamed. "You shouldn't have put something like her off on me! My house is respectable!"

"Tell her to call the sheriff," Thomas shouted. His mother put the receiver down and looked at him. "I wouldn't turn a dog over to that man," she said. Thomas sat in the chair with his arms folded and looked fixedly at the wall. "Think of the poor girl, Thomas," his mother said, "with nothing. Nothing. And we have everything."

When they arrived, Sarah Ham was slumped spraddle-leggcd against the banister on the boarding house front-steps. Her tarn was down on her forehead where the old woman had slammed it and her clothes were bulging out of her suitcase where the old woman had thrown them in. She was carrying on a drunken conversation with herself in a low personal tone. A steak of lipstick ran up one side of her face. She allowed herself to be guided by his mother to the car and put in the back seat without seeming to know who the rescuer was. "Nothing to talk to all day but a pack of goddamned parakeets," she said in a furious whisper.

Thomas, who had not got out of the car at all, or looked at her after the first revolted glance, said, "I'm telling you, once and for all, the place to take her is the jail."

His mother, sitting on the back seat, holding the girl's hand, did not answer.

"All right, take her to the hotel," he said.

"I cannot take a drunk girl to a hotel, Thomas," she said. "You know that." "Then take her to a hospital." "She doesn't need a jail or a hotel or a hospital," his mother said, "she needs a home."

"She docs not need mine," Thomas said.

"Only for tonight, Thomas," the old lady sighed. "Only for tonight."

Since then eight days had passed. The little slut was established in the guest room. Every day his mother set out to find her a job and a place to board, and failed, for the old woman had broadcast a warning. Thomas kept to his room or the den. His home was to him home, workshop, church, as personal as the shell of a turtle and as necessary. He could not believe that it could be violated in this

way. His flushed face had a constant look of stunned outrage.

As soon as the girl was up in the morning, her voice throbbed out in a blues song that would rise and waver, then plunge low with insinuations of passion about to be satisfied and Thomas, at his desk, would lunge up and begin frantically stuffling his ears with Kleenex. Each time he started from one room to another, one floor to another, she would be certain to appear. Each time he was halfway up or down the stairs, she would either meet him and pass, cringing coyly, or go up or down behind him, breathing small tragic spearmint-flavored sighs. She appeared to adore Thomas's repugnance to her and to draw it out of him every chance she got as if it added delectably to her martyrdom.

The old man—small, wasp-like, in his yellowed panama hat, his seersucker suit, his pink carefully-soiled shirt, his small string **tic**—appeared to have taken up his station in Thomas's mind and from there, usually squatting, he shot out the same rasping suggestion every time the boy paused from his forced studies. Put your foot down. Go to see the sheriff.

The sheriff was another edition of Thomas's father except that he wore a checkered shirt and a Texas type hat and was ten years **younger.** He was as easily dishonest, and he had genuinely admired **the** old man. Thomas, like his mother, would have gone far out of his way to avoid his glassy pale blue gaze. He kept hoping for **another** solution, for a miracle.

With Sarah Ham in the house, meals were unbearable.

"Tomsee doesn't like me," she said the third or fourth night at **the** supper table and cast her pouting gaze across at the large rigid **figure** of Thomas, whose face was set with the look of a man trap

ped by insufferable odors. "He doesn't want me here. Nobody wants me
anywhere." "Thomas's name is Thomas," his mother interrupted. "Not

Tomsee."

"I made Tomsee up," she said. "I think it's cute. He hates me."

"Thomas does not hate you," his mother said. "We are not the kind of people who hate," she added, as if this were an imperfection that had been bred out of them generations ago.

"Oh, I know when I'm not wanted," Sarah Ham continued. "They didn't even want me in jail. If I killed myself I wonder would God want me?"

"Try it and see," Thomas muttered.

The girl screamed with laughter. Then she stopped abruptly, her face puckered and she began to shake. "The best thing to do," she said, her teeth clattering, "is to kill myself. Then I'll be out of everybody's way. I'll go to hell and be out of God's way. And even the devil won't want me. He'll kick me out of hell, not even

in hell . . ." she wailed.

Thomas rose, picked up his plate and knife and fork and carried them to the den to finish his supper. After that, he had not eaten another meal at the table but had had his mother serve him at his desk. At these meals, the old man was intensely present to him. He appeared to be tipping backwards in his chair, his thumbs beneath his galluses, while he said such things as, She never ran me away from my own table.

A few nights later, Sarah Ham slashed her wrists with a paring knife and had hysterics. From the den where he was closeted after supper, Thomas heard a shriek, then a series of screams, then his mother's scurrying footsteps through the house. He did not move. His first instant of hope that the girl had cut her throat faded as he realized she could not have done it and continue to scream the way she was doing. He returned to his journal and presently the screams subsided. In a moment his mother burst in with bis coat and hat. "We have to take her to the hospital," she said. "She tried to do away with herself. I have a tourniquet on her arm. Oh Lord, Thomas," she said, "imagine being so low you'd do a thing like that I"

Thomas rose woodenly and put on his hat and coat. "We will take her to the hospital," he said, "and we will leave her there."

"And drive her to despair again?" the old lady cried. "Thomas!"

Standing in the center of his room now, realizing that he had reached the point where action was inevitable, that he must pack, that he must leave, that he must go, Thomas remained immovable.

His fury was directed not at the little slut but at his mother. Even though the doctor had found that she had barely damaged herself and had raised the girl's wrath by laughing at the tourniquet and putting only a streak of iodine on the cut, his mother could not get over the incident. Some new weight of sorrow seemed to have been thrown across her shoulders, and not only Thomas, but Sarah Ham was infuriated by this, for it appeared to be a general sorrow that would have found another object no matter what good fortune came to either of them. The experience of Sarah Ham had plunged the old lady into mourning for the world.

The morning after the attempted suicide, she had gone through the house and collected all the knives and scissors and locked them in a drawer. She emptied a bottle of rat poison down the toilet and took up the roach tablets from the kitchen floor. Then she came to Thomas's study and said in a whisper, "Where is that gun of his? I want you to lock it up."

"The gun is in my drawer," Thomas roared, "and I will not lock it up. If she shoots herself, so much the better I"

"Thomas," his mother said, "she'll hear you I"

"Let her hear me!" Thomas yelled. "Don't you know she has no intention of killing herself? Don't you know her kind never kill themselves? Don't you . . ."

His mother slipped out the door and closed it to silence him and Sarah Ham's laugh, quite close in the hall, came rattling into his room. "Tomsee'll find out. I'll kill myself and then he'll be sorry he wasn't nice to me. I'll use his own lil gun, his own lil ol' pearl-handled revol-lervuh!" she shouted and let out a loud tormented-sounding laugh in imitation of a movie monster.

Thomas ground his teeth. He pulled out his desk drawer and felt for the pistol. It was an inheritance from the old man, whose Opinion it had been that every house should contain a loaded gun.
He had discharged two bullets one night into the side of a prowler, but Thomas had never shot anything. He had no fear that the girl would use the gun on herself and he closed the drawer. Her kind clung tenaciously to life and were able to wrest some histrionic advantage from every moment.

Several ideas for getting rid of her had entered his head but each of these had been suggestions whose moral tone indicated that they had come from a mind akin to his father's, and Thomas had rejected them. He could not get die girl locked up again until she did something illegal. The old man would have been able with no qualms at all to get her drunk and send her out on the highway in his car, meanwhile notifying the highway patrol of her presence on the road, but Thomas considered this below his moral stature. Suggestions continued to come to him, each more outrageous than the last.

He had not the vaguest hope that the girl would get the gun and shoot herself, but that afternoon when he looked in the drawer, the gun was gone. His study locked from the inside, not the out. He cared nothing about the gun, but the thought of Sarah Ham's hands sliding among his papers infuriated him. Now even his study was contaminated. The only place left untouched by her was his bedroom.

That night she entered it.

In the morning at breakfast, he did not eat and did not sit down. He stood beside his chair and delivered his ultimatum while his mother sipped her coffee as if she were both alone in the room and in great pain. "I have stood this," he said, "for as long as I am able. Since I see plainly that you care nothing about me, about my peace or comfort or working conditions, I am about to take the only step open to me. I will give you one more day. If you bring the girl back into this house this afternoon, I leave. You can choose— her or me." He had more to say but at that point his voice cracked and he left.

At ten o'clock his mother and Sarah Ham left the house.

At four he heard the car wheels on die gravel and rushed to

the window. As the car stopped, the dog stood up, alert, shaking.

He seemed unable to take the first step that would set him walking to die closet in the hall to look for the suitcase. He was like a man handed a knife and told to operate on himself if he wished to live. His huge hands clenched helplessly. His expression was a turmoil of indecision and outrage. His pale blue eyes seemed to sweat in his broiling face. He closed them for a moment and on die back of his lids, his father's image leered at him. Idiot) the old man hissed, idiot! The criminal slut stole your gun! See the sheriff! See die sheriff!

It was a moment before Thomas opened his eyes. He seemed newly stunned. He stood where he was for at least three minutes, then he turned slowly like a large vessel reversing its direction and faced the door. He stood there a moment longer, then he left, his face set to see the ordeal through.

He did not know where he would find the sheriff. The man made his own rules and kept his own hours. Thomas stopped first at the jail where his office was, but he was not in it. He went to the courthouse and was told by a clerk that the sheriff had gone to barber shop across the street. "Yonder's the deppity," the clerk said and pointed out the window to the large figure of a man in a checkered shirt, who was leaning against the side of a police car, looking into space.

"It has to be the sheriff," Thomas said and left for the barber shop. As little as he wanted anything to do with the sheriff, he realized diat the man was at least intelligent and not simply a mound of sweating flesh.

The barber said the sheriff had just left. Thomas started back to the courthouse and as he stepped on to the sidewalk from the street, he saw a lean, slighdy stooped figure gesticulating angrily at the deputy.

Thomas approached with an aggressiveness brought on by nervous agitation. He stopped abruptly three feet away and said in an over-loud voice, "Can I have a word with you?" widiout adding the sheriff's name, which was Farebrother.

Farebrother turned his sharp creased face just enough to take Thomas in, and the deputy did likewise, but neither spoke. The sheriff removed a very small piece of cigarette from his lip and dropped it at his feet. "I told you what to do," he said to the deputy.

Ihen he moved off with a slight nod that indicated Thomas could follow him if he wanted to see him. The deputy slunk around the front of the police car and got inside.

Farebrother, with Thomas following, headed across the courthouse square and stopped beneath a tree that shaded a quarter of the front lawn. He waited, leaning slightly forward, and lit another cigarette.

Thomas began to blurt out his business. As he had not had time to prepare his

words, he was barely coherent. By repeating the same thing over several times, he managed at length to get out what he wanted to say. When he finished, the sheriff was still leaning slightly forward, at an angle to him, his eyes on nothing in particular. He remained that way without speaking.

Thomas began again, slower and in a lamer voice, and Fare-brother let him continue for some time before he said, "We had her oncet." He then allowed himself a slow, creased, all-knowing, quarter smile.

"I had nothing to do with that," Thomas said. "That was my mother." Farebrother squatted. "She was trying to help the girl," Thomas said. "She didn't know she couldn't be helped." "Bit off more than she could chew, I reckon," the voice below him mused. "She has nothing to do with this," Thomas said. "She doesn't know I'm here. The girl is dangerous with that gun." *"He,"* the sheriff said, "never let anything grow under his feet. Particularly nothing a woman planted." "She might kill somebody with that gun," Thomas said weakly,

looking down at the round top of the Texas type hat. There was a long time of silence. "Where's she got it?" Farebrother asked. "I don't know. She sleeps in the guest room. It must be in there, in her suitcase probably," Thomas said. Farebrother lapsed into silence again. "You could come search the guest room," Thomas said in a strained voice. "I can go home and leave the latch off the front door and you can come in quietly and go upstairs and search her room."

Farebrother turned his head so that his eyes looked boldly at Thomas's knees. "You seem to know how it ought to be done," he said. "Want to swap jobs?"

Thomas said nothing because he could not think of anything to say, but he waited doggedly. Farebrother removed the cigarette butt from his lips and dropped it on the grass. Beyond him on the courthouse porch a group of loiterers who had been leaning at the left of the door moved over to the right where a patch of sunlight had settled. From one of the upper windows a crumpled piece of paper blew out and drifted down.

"I'll come along about six," Farebrother said. "Leave the latch off the door and keep out of my way—yourself and them two women too."

Thomas let out a rasping sound of relief meant to be "Thanks," and struck off across the grass like someone released. The phrase, "them two women," stuck like a burr in his brain—the subtlety of the insult to his mother hurting him more than any of Farebrother's references to his own incompetence. As he got into his car, his face suddenly flushed. Had he delivered his mother over to the sheriff—to be a butt for the man's tongue? Was he betraying her to get rid of the little

slut? He saw at once that this was not the case. He was doing what he was doing for her own good, to rid her of a parasite that would ruin their peace. He started his car and drove quickly home but once he had turned in the driveway, he decided it would be better to park some distance from the house and go quietly in by the back door. He parked on the grass and on the grass walked in a circle toward the rear of the house. The sky was lined with mustard-colored streaks. The dog was asleep on the back doormat. At the approach of his master's step, he opened one yellow eye, took him in, and closed it again.

Thomas let himself into the kitchen. It was empty and the house was quiet enough for him to be aware of the loud ticking of the kitchen clock. It was a quarter to six. He tiptoed hurriedly through the hall to the front door and took the latch off it. Then he stood for a moment listening. From behind die closed parlor door, he heard his mother snoring softly and presumed that she had gone to sleep while reading. On die other side of die hall, not three feet from his study, the little slut's black coat and red pocketbook were slung on a chair. He heard water running upstairs and decided she was taking a bath.

He went into his study and sat down at his desk to wait, noting with distaste that every few moments a tremor ran dirough him. He sat for a minute or two doing nodiing. Then he picked up a pen and began to draw squares on the back of an envelope that lay before him. He looked at his watch. It was eleven minutes to six. After a moment he idly drew the center drawer of die desk out over his lap. For a moment he stared at the gun without recognition. Then he gave a yelp and leaped up. She had put it back!

Idiot I his father hissed, idiot I Go plant it in her pocketbook. Don't just stand there. Go plant it in her pocketbook!

Thomas stood staring at the drawer.

Moron! the old man fumed. Quick while there's time! Go plant it in her pocketbook. Thomas did not move. Imbecile! his father cried. Thomas picked up die gun. Make haste, the old man ordered. Thomas started forward, holding die gun away from him. He opened the door and looked at the chair. The black coat and red pocketbook were lying on it almost within reach.

Hurry up, you fool, his father said.

From behind the parlor door the almost inaudible snores of his mother rose and fell. They seemed to mark an order of time mat had nothing to do with the instants left to Thomas. There was no odier sound.

Quick, you imbecile, before she wakes up, *the* old man said.

The snores stopped and Thomas heard the sofa springs groan. He grabbed die

red pocketbook. It had a skin-like feel to his touch and as it opened, he caught an unmistakable odor of die girl. Wincing, he thrust in the gun and then drew back. His face burned an ugly dull red.

"What is Tomsee putting in my purse?" she called and her pleased laugh bounced down the staircase. Thomas whirled.

She was at the top of the stair, coming down in the manner of a fashion model, one bare leg and then the other thrusting out die front of her kimona in a definite rhythm. "Tomsee is being naughty," she said in a throaty voice. She reached the bottom and cast a possessive leer at Thomas whose face was now more gray dian red. She reached out, pulled the bag open with her finger and peered at the gun.

His mother opened the parlor door and looked out.

"Tomsee put his pistol in my bag!" the girl shrieked.

"Ridiculous," his mother said, yawning. "What would Thomas want to put his pistol in your bag for?" Thomas stood slightly hunched, his hands hanging helplessly at die wrists as if he had just pulled them up out of a pool of blood.

"I don't know what for," the girl said, "but he sure did it," and she proceeded to walk around Thomas, her hands on her hips, her neck thrust forward and her intimate grin fixed on him fiercely. All at once her expression seemed to open as the purse had opened when Thomas touched it. She stood with her head cocked on one side in an attitude of disbelief. "Oh boy," she said slowly, "is he a case."

At that instant Thomas damned not only the girl but the entire order of the universe that made her possible. "Thomas wouldn't put a gun in your bag," his mother said. "Thomas is a gentleman." The girl made a chortling noise. "You can see it in there," she said and pointed to the open purse.

You *found* it in her bag, you dimwit! the old man hissed.

"I found it in her bag!" Thomas shouted. "The dirty criminal slut stole my gun!" His mother gasped at die sound of the other presence in his voice. The old lady's sybil-like face turned pale.

"Found it my eye!" Sarah Ham shrieked and started for the pocketbook, but Thomas, as if his arm were guided by his father, caught it first and snatched the gun. The girl in a frenzy lunged at Thomas's throat and would actually have caught him around the neck had not his mother thrown herself forward to protect her.

Fire! the old man yelled. Thomas fired. The blast was like a sound meant to bring an end to evil in die world. Thomas heard it as a sound that would shatter the laughter of sluts until all shrieks were stilled and nothing was left to disturb the peace of perfect order.

The echo died away in waves. Before the last one had faded, Farebrother opened the door and put his head inside the hall. His nose wrinkled. His expression for some few seconds was diat of a man unwilling to admit surprise. His eyes were clear as glass, reflecting die scene. The old lady lay on the floor between the girl and Thomas.

The sheriff's brain worked instantly like a calculating machine. He saw die facts as if they were already in print: the fellow had intended all along to kill his mother and pin it on the girl. But Fare-brother had been too quick for him. They were not yet aware of his head in die door. As he scrutinized die scene, further insights were flashed to him. Over her body, die killer and die slut were about to collapse into each other's arms. The sheriff knew a nasty bit when he saw it. He was accustomed to enter upon scenes diat were not as bad as he had hoped to find diem, but tJus one met his expectations.

Everything That Rises Must Converge

HER doctor had told Julian's motiier that she must lose twenty pounds on account of her blood pressure, so on Wednesday nights Julian had to take her downtown on the bus for a reducing class at die Y. The reducing class was designed for working girls over fifty, who weighed from 165 to 200 pounds. His modier was one of tiie slimmer ones, but she said ladies did not tell tiieir age or weight. She would not ride the buses by herself at night since they had been integrated, and because die reducing class was one of her few pleasures, necessary for her healtii, and *free*, she said Julian could at least put himself out to take her, considering all she did for him. Julian did not like to consider all she did for him, but every Wednesday night he braced himself and took her. She was almost ready to go, standing before die hall mirror, putting on her hat, while he, his hands behind him, appeared pinned to die door frame, waiting like Saint Sebastian for die arrows to begin piercing him. The hat was new and had cost her seven dollars and a half. She kept saying, "Maybe I shouldn't have paid diat for it. No, I shouldn't have. I'll take it off and return it tomorrow. I shouldn't have bought it." Julian raised his eyes to heaven. "Yes, you should have bought it," he said. "Put it on and let's go." It was a hideous hat. A purple velvet flap came down on one side of it and stood up on the odier; the rest of it was green and looked like a cushion widi die stuffing out. He decided it was less comical dian jaunty and padietic. Everything diat gave her pleasure was small and depressed him.

She lifted the hat one more time and set it down slowly on top of her head. Two wings of gray hair protruded on either side of her florid face, but her eyes, sky-blue, were as innocent and untouched by experience as they must have been when she was ten. Were it not that she was a widow who had struggled fiercely to feed and clothe and put him through school and who was supporting him still, "until he got on his feet," she might have been a little girl that he had to take to town.

"It's all right, it's all right," he said. "Let's go." He opened the door himself and started down the walk to get her going. The sky was a dying violet and the houses stood out darkly against it, bulbous liver-colored monstrosities of a uniform ugliness though no two were alike. Since this had been a fashionable neighborhood forty years ago, his mother persisted in thinking they did well to have an apartment in it. Each house had a narrow collar of dirt around it in

which sat, usually, a grubby child. Julian walked with his hands in his pockets, his head down and thrust forward and his eyes glazed widi the determination to make himself completely numb during the time he would be sacrificed to her pleasure.

The door closed and he turned to find the dumpy figure, surmounted by the atrocious hat, coming toward him. "Well," she said, "you only live once and paying a little more for it, I at least won't meet myself coming and going."

"Some day I'll start making money," Julian said gloomily—he knew he never would—"and you can have one of those jokes whenever you take the fit." But first they would move. He visualized a place where the nearest neighbors would be three miles away on either side.

"I think you're doing fine," she said, drawing on her gloves.

"You've only been out of school a year. Rome wasn't built in a day."

She was one of the few members of the Y reducing class who arrived in hat and gloves and who had a son who had been to col lege. "It takes time," she said, "and the world is in such a mess. This hat looked better on me than any of the others, though when she brought it out I said, 'Take that thing back. I wouldn't have it on my head,' and she said, 'Now wait till you see it on,' and when she put it on me, I said, 'We-ull,' and she said, 'If you ask me, that hat does something for you and you do something for the hat, and besides,' she said, 'with that hat, you won't meet yourself coming and going.'"

Julian thought he could have stood his lot better if she had been selfish, if she had been an old hag who drank and screamed at him. He walked along, saturated in depression, as if in the midst of his martyrdom he had lost his faith. Catching sight of his long, hopeless, irritated face, she stopped suddenly with a grief-stricken look, and pulled back on his arm. "Wait on me," she said. "I'm going back to the house and take this thing off and tomorrow I'm going to return it. I was out of my head. I can pay the gas bill with the seven-fifty."

He caught her arm in a vicious grip. "You are not going to take it back," he said. "I like it."

"Well," she said, "I don't think I ought . . ."

"Shut up and enjoy it," he muttered, more depressed than ever.

"With the world in the mess it's in," she said, "it's a wonder we can enjoy anything. I tell you, the bottom rail is on the top." Julian sighed. "Of course," she said, "if you know who you are, you can go any where." She said this every time he took her to the reducing class. "Most of them

in it are not our kind of people," she said, "but I can be gracious to anybody. I know who I am."

"They don't give a damn for your graciousness," Julian said savagely. "Knowing who you are is good for one generation only. You haven't the foggiest idea where you stand now or who you are."

She stopped and allowed her eyes to flash at him. "I most certainly do know who I am," she said, "and if you don't know who you are, I'm ashamed of you."

"Oh hell," Julian said.

"Your great-grandfather was a former governor of this state," she said. "Your grandfather was a prosperous landowner. Your grandmother was a Godhigh."

"Will you look around you," he said tensely, "and see where you are now?" and he swept his arm jerkily out to indicate the neighborhood, which the growing darkness at least made less dingy.

"You remain what you are," she said. "Your great-grandfather had a plantation and two hundred slaves."

"There are no more slaves," he said irritably.

"They were better off when they were," she said. He groaned to see that she was off on that topic. She rolled onto it every few days like a train on an open track. He knew every stop, every junction, every swamp along die way, and knew the exact point at which her conclusion would roll majestically into the station: "It's ridiculous. It's simply not realistic. They should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence."

"Let's skip it," Julian said.

"The ones I feel sorry for," she said, "are the ones that are half white. They're tragic."

"Will you skip it?"

"Suppose we were half white. We would certainly have mixed feelings." "I have mixed feelings now," he groaned. "Well let's talk about something pleasant," she said. "I remember

going to Grandpa's when I was a little girl. Then the house had double stairways that went up to what was really the second floor— all the cooking was done on the first. I used to like to stay down in the kitchen on account of the way the walls smelled. I would sit with my nose pressed against die plaster and take deep breaths. Actually the place belonged to the Godhighs but your grandfather Chestny paid the mortgage and saved it for them. They were in reduced circumstances," she said, "but reduced or not, diey never forgot who they were."

"Doubtless diat decayed mansion reminded diem," Julian mut

tered. He never spoke of it without contempt or thought of it widi

out longing. He had seen it once when he was a child before it had been sold. The double stairways had rotted and been torn down. Negroes were living in it. But it remained in his mind as his modier had known it. It appeared in his dreams regularly. He would stand on die wide porch, listening to the rustle of oak leaves, dien wander through die high-ceilinged hall into the parlor that opened onto it and gaze at the worn rugs and faded draperies. It occurred to him diat it was he, not she, who could have appreciated it. He preferred its threadbare elegance to anything he could name and it was because of it that all the neighborhoods they had lived in had been a torment to him—whereas she had hardly known the difference. She called her insensitivity "being adjustable."

"And I remember the old darky who was my nurse, Caroline. There was no better person in the world. I've always had a great respect for my colored friends," she said. "I'd do anything in the world for them and they'd . . ."

"Will you for God's sake get off diat subject?" Julian said. When he got on a bus by himself, he made it a point to sit down beside a Negro, in reparation as it were for his mother's sins.

"You're mighty touchy tonight," she said. "Do you feel all right?"

"Yes I feel all right," he said. "Now lay off."

She pursed her lips. "Well, you certainly are in a vile humor," she observed. "I just won't speak to you at all."

They had reached the bus stop. There was no bus in sight and Julian, his hands still jammed in his pockets and his head thrust forward, scowled down the empty street. The frustration of having to wait on the bus as well as ride on it began to creep up his neck like a hot hand. The presence of his mother was borne in upon him as she gave a pained sigh. He looked at her bleakly. She was holding herself very erect under the preposterous hat, wearing it like a banner of her imaginary dignity. There was in him an evil urge to break her spirit. He suddenly unloosened his tie and pulled it off and put it in his pocket.

She stiffened. "Why must you look like *that* when you take me to town?" she said. "Why must you deliberately embarrass me?" "If you'll never learn where you are," he said, "you can at least learn where I am."

"You look like a—thug," she said.

"Then I must be one," he murmured.

"I'll just go home," she said. "I will not bother you. If you can't do a little thing like that for me . . ."

Rolling his eyes upward, he put his tie back on. "Restored to my class," he

muttered. He thrust his face toward her and hissed, "True culture is in the mind, the *mind,"* he said, and tapped his head, **"the** mind."

"It's in die heart," she said, "and in how you do diings and how you do things is because of who you *are."*

"Nobody in the damn bus cares who you are."

"I care who I am," she said icily.

The lighted bus appeared on top of die next hill and as it ap proached, they moved out into die street to meet it. He put his hand under her elbow and hoisted her up on die creaking step. She entered widi a little smile, as if she were going into a drawing room where everyone had been waiting for her. While he put in die tokens, she sat down on one of die broad front seats for three which faced the aisle. A diin woman widi protruding teedi and long yellow hair was sitting on the end of it. His mother moved up beside her and left room for Julian beside herself. He sat down and looked at die floor across die aisle where a pair of diin feet in red and white canvas sandals were planted.

His modier immediately began a general conversation meant to attract anyone who felt like talking. "Can it get any hotter?" she said and removed from her purse a folding fan, black widi a Japanese scene on it, which she began to flutter before her.

"I reckon it might could," die woman widi die protruding teedi said, "but I know for a fact my apartment couldn't get no hotter."

"It must get the afternoon sun," his mother said. She sat forward and looked up and down the bus. It was half filled. Everybody was white. "I see we have die bus to ourselves," she said. Julian cringed.

"For a change," said the woman across die aisle, die owner of the red and white canvas sandals. "I come on one die other day and diey were thick as fleas—up front and all through."

"The world is in a mess everywhere," his mother said. "I don't know how we've let it get in this fix."

"What gets my goat is all diose boys from good families stealing automobile tires," die woman with die protruding teedi said. "I told my boy, I said you may not be rich but you been raised right and if I ever catch you in any such mess, diey can send you on to die re formatory. Be exactly where you belong."

"Training tells," his mother said. "Is your boy in high school?"

"Nindi grade," the woman said.

"My son just finished college last year. He wants to write but he's selling typewriters until he gets started," his mother said.

The woman leaned forward and peered at Julian. He threw her such a

malevolent look that she subsided against the seat. On the floor across the aisle there was an abandoned newspaper. He got up and got it and opened it out in front of him. His mother discreetly continued the conversation in a lower tone but the woman across the aisle said in a loud voice, "Well that's nice. Selling typewriters is close to writing. He can go right from one to the other."

"I tell him," his mother said, "that Rome wasn't built in a day."

Behind the newspaper Julian was withdrawing into the inner compartment of his mind where he spent most of his time. This was a kind of mental bubble in which he established himself when he could not bear to be a part of what was going on around him. From it he could see out and judge but in it he was safe from any kind of penetration from without. It was the only place where he felt free of the general idiocy of his fellows. His mother had never entered it but from it he could see her with absolute clarity.

The old lady was clever enough and he thought that if she had started from any of the right premises, more might have been expected of her. She lived according to the laws of her own fantasy world, outside of which he had never seen her set foot. The law of it was to sacrifice herself for him after she had first created the necessity to do so by making a mess of things. If he had permitted her sacrifices, it was only because her lack of foresight had made them necessary. All of her life had been a struggle to act like a Chestny widiout the Chestny goods, and to give him everydiing she thought a Chestny ought to have; but since, said she, it was fun to struggle, why complain? And when you had won, as she had won, what fun to look back on die hard times! He could not forgive her that she had enjoyed the struggle and that she thought *she* had won.

What she meant when she said she had won was that she had brought him up successfully and had sent him to college and that he had turned out so well—good looking (her teetii had gone unfilled so that his could be straightened), intelligent (he realized he was too intelligent to be a success), and with a future ahead of him (there was of course no future ahead of him). She excused his gloominess on die grounds that he was still growing up and his radical ideas on his lack of practical experience. She said he didn't yet know a thing about "life," that he hadn't even entered die real world—when already he was as disenchanted with it as a man of fifty.

The further irony of all this was that in spite of her, he had turned out so well. In spite of going to only a third-rate college, he had, on his own initiative, come out with a first-rate education; in spite of growing up dominated by a small mind, he had ended up with a large one; in spite of all her foolish views, he was free of prejudice and unafraid to face facts. Most miraculous of all, instead of being blinded by love for her as she was for him, he had cut himself emotionally

free of her and could see her with complete objectivity. He was not dominated by his mother.

The bus stopped with a sudden jerk and shook him from his meditation. A woman from the back lurched forward with little steps and barely escaped falling in his newspaper as she righted herself. She got off and a large Negro got on. Julian kept his paper lowered to watch. It gave him a certain satisfaction to see injustice in daily operation. It confirmed his view that with a few exceptions there was no one worth knowing within a radius of three hundred miles. The Negro was well dressed and carried a briefcase. He looked around and then sat down on the other end of the seat where the woman with the red and white canvas sandals was sitting. He immediately unfolded a newspaper and obscured himself behind it. Julian's mother's elbow at once prodded insistently into his ribs. "Now you see why I won't ride on these buses by myself," she whispered.

The woman with the red and white canvas sandals had risen at the same time the Negro sat down and had gone further back in the bus and taken the seat of die woman who had got off. His mother leaned forward and cast her an approving look.

Julian rose, crossed the aisle, and sat down in the place of the woman with the canvas sandals. From this position, he looked serenely across at his mother. Her face had turned an angry red. He stared at her, making his eyes the eyes of a stranger. He felt his tension suddenly lift as if he had openly declared war on her.

He would have liked to get in conversation with the Negro and to talk with him about art or politics or any subject that would be above the comprehension of those around them, but the man remained entrenched behind his paper. He was either ignoring the change of seating or had never noticed it. There was no way for Julian to convey his sympathy.

His mother kept her eyes fixed reproachfully on his face. The woman with the protruding teeth was looking at him avidly as if he were a type of monster new to her.

"Do you have a light?" he asked the Negro. Without looking away from his paper, the man reached in his pocket and handed him a packet of matches.

"Thanks," Julian said. For a moment he held the matches foolishly. A NO SMOKING sign looked down upon him from over the door. This alone would not have deterred him; he had no cigarettes. He had quit smoking some months before because he could not afford it. "Sorry," he muttered and handed back the matches. The Negro lowered the paper and gave him an annoyed look. He took the matches and raised the paper again.

His mother continued to gaze at him but she did not take advantage of his

momentary discomfort. Her eyes retained their battered look. Her face seemed to be unnaturally red, as if her blood pressure had risen. Julian allowed no glimmer of sympathy to show on his face. Having got the advantage, he wanted desperately to keep it and carry it through. He would have liked to teach her a lesson that would last her a while, but there seemed no way to continue the point. The Negro refused to come out from behind his paper.

Julian folded his arms and looked stolidly before him, facing her but as if he did not see her, as if he had ceased to recognize her existence. He visualized a scene in which, the bus having reached their stop, he would remain in his seat and when she said, "Aren't you going to get off?" he would look at her as at a stranger who had rashly addressed him. The corner they got off on was usually deserted, but it was well lighted and it would not hurt her to walk by herself the four blocks to the Y. He decided to wait until the time came and then decide whether or not he would let her get off by herself. He would have to be at the Y at ten to bring her back, but he could leave her wondering if he was going to show up. There was no reason for her to think she could always depend on him.

He retired again into the high-ceilinged room sparsely settled with large pieces of antique furniture. His soul expanded momentarily but then he became aware of his mother across from him and the vision shriveled. He studied her coldly. Her feet in little pumps dangled like a child's and did not quite reach the floor. She was training on him an exaggerated look of reproach. He felt completely detached from her. At that moment he could with pleasure have slapped her as he would have slapped a particularly obnoxious child in his charge.

He began to imagine various unlikely ways by which he could teach her a lesson. He might make friends witii some distinguished Negro professor or lawyer and bring him home to spend the evening. He would be entirely justified but her blood pressure would rise to 300. He could not push her to the extent of making her have a stroke, and moreover, he had never been successful at making any Negro friends. He had tried to strike up an acquaintance on the bus with some of die better types, with ones that looked like professors or ministers or lawyers. One morning he had sat down next to a distinguished-looking dark brown man who had answered his questions with a sonorous solemnity but who had turned out to be an undertaker. Another day he had sat down beside a cigar-smoking Negro with a diamond ring on his finger, but after a few stilted pleasantries, the Negro had rung the buzzer and risen, slipping two lottery tickets into Julian's hand as he climbed over him to leave.

He imagined his mother lying desperately ill and his being able to secure only a Negro doctor for her. He toyed with that idea for a few minutes and then

dropped it for a momentary vision of himself participating as a sympadiizer in a sit-in demonstration. This was possible but he did not linger with it. Instead, he approached die ukimate horror. He brought home a beautiful suspiciously Negroid woman. Prepare yourself, he said. There is notliing you can do about it. This is the woman I've chosen. She's intelligent, dignified, even good, and she's suffered and she hasn't thought it *fun.* Now persecute us, go ahead and persecute us. Drive her out of here, but remember, you're driving me too. His eyes were narrowed and through tiie indignation he had generated, he saw his motiier across the aisle, purple-faced, shrunken to the dwarf-like proportions of her moral nature, sitting like a mummy beneath the ridiculous banner of her hat.

He was tilted out of his fantasy again as the bus stopped. The door opened with a sucking hiss and out of the dark a large, gaily dressed, sullen-looking colored woman got on with a little boy. The child, who might have been four, had on a short plaid suit and a Tyrolean hat with a blue feather in it. Julian hoped that he would sit down beside him and that the woman would push in beside his mother. He could think of no better arrangement.

As she waited for her tokens, the woman was surveying the seating possibilities—he hoped with the idea of sitting where she was least wanted. There was something familiar-looking about her but Julian could not place what it was. She was a giant of a woman. Her face was set not only to meet oppositon but to seek it out. The downward tilt of her large lower lip was like a warning sign: DON'T TAMPER WITH ME. Her bulging figure was encased in a green crepe dress and her feet overflowed in red shoes. She had on a hideous hat. A purple velvet flap came down on one side of it and stood up on the other; the rest of it was green and looked like a cushion with the stuffing out. She carried a mammoth red pocketbook that bulged throughout as if it were stuffed with rocks.

To Julian's disappointment, the little boy climbed up on the empty seat beside his mother. His mother lumped all children, black and white, into the common category, "cute," and she thought litde Negroes were on the whole cuter than little white children. She smiled at the little boy as he climbed on the seat.

Meanwhile die woman was bearing down upon the empty seat beside Julian. To his annoyance, she squeezed herself into it. He saw his modier's face change as die woman settled herself next to him and he realized with satisfaction that this was more objectionable to her than it was to him. Her face seemed almost gray and there was a look of dull recognition in her eyes, as if suddenly she had sickened at some awful confrontation. Julian saw that it was because she and die woman had, in a sense, swapped sons. Though his modier would not realize die symbolic significance of this, she would feel it. His amusement showed plainly on his face.

The woman next to him muttered something unintelligible to herself. He was conscious of a kind of bristling next to him, muted growling like that of an angry cat. He could not see anydiing but the red pocketbook upright on the bulging green diighs. He visualized the woman as she had stood waiting for her tokens—die ponderous figure, rising from the red shoes upward over the solid hips, the mammoth bosom, the haughty face, to die green and purple hat.

His eyes widened.

The vision of the two hats, identical, broke upon him with die radiance of a brilliant sunrise. His face was suddenly lit with joy. He could not believe that Fate had dirust upon his mother such a lesson. He gave a loud chuckle so that she would look at him and see that he saw. She turned her eyes on him slowly. The blue in them seemed to have turned a bruised purple. For a moment he had an uncomfortable sense of her innocence, but it lasted only a second before principle rescued him. Justice entitled him to laugh. His grin hardened until it said to her as plainly as if he were saying aloud: Your punishment exactly fits your pettiness. This should teach you a permanent lesson.

Her eyes shifted to the woman. She seemed unable to bear looking at him and to find the woman preferable. He became conscious again of the bristling presence at his side. The woman was rumbling like a volcano about to become active. His mother's moudi began to twitch slightly at one corner. With a sinking heart, he saw incipient signs of recovery on her face and realized that this was going to strike her suddenly as funny and was going to be no lesson at all. She kept her eyes on the woman and an amused smile came over her face as if the woman were a monkey diat had stolen **her** hat. The little Negro was looking up at her with large fascinated eyes. He had been trying to attract her attention for some time.

"Carver!" die woman said suddenly. "Come heah!"

When he saw that the spotlight was on him at last, Carver drew his feet up and turned himself toward Julian's mother and giggled. "Carver!" the woman said. "You heah me? Come heah!" Carver slid down from the seat but remained squatting with **his**

back against the base of it, his head turned slyly around toward Julian's mother, who was smiling at him. The woman reached a hand across the aisle and snatched him to her. He righted himself and hung backwards on her knees, grinning at Julian's mother. "Isn't he cute?" Julian's mother said to the woman with the protruding teeth.

"I reckon he is," die woman said without conviction.

The Negress yanked him upright but he eased out of her grip and shot across

the aisle and scrambled, giggling wildly, onto the seat beside his love.

"I think he likes me," Julian's mother said, and smiled at the woman. It was the smile she used when she was being particularly gracious to an inferior. Julian saw everything lost. The lesson had rolled off her like rain on a roof.

The woman stood up and yanked die little boy off die seat as if she were snatching him from contagion. Julian could feel the rage in her at having no weapon like his mother's smile. She gave the child a sharp slap across his leg. He howled once and dien thrust his head into her stomach and kicked his feet against her shins. "Behave," she said vehemently.

The bus stopped and the Negro who had been reading the newspaper got off. The woman moved over and set the little boy down with a thump between herself and Julian. She held him firmly by the knee. In a moment he put his hands in front of his face and peeped at Julian's mother through his fingers.

"I see yoooooooo!" she said and put her hand in front of her face and peeped at him. The woman slapped his hand down. "Quit yo' foolishness," she said, "before I knock the living Jesus out of you!"

Julian was thankful that the next stop was theirs. He reached up and pulled die cord. The woman reached up and pulled it at the same time. Oh my God, he thought. He had die terrible intuition that when diey got off the bus togedier, his modier would open her purse and give die little boy a nickel. The gesture would be as natural to her as breadiing. The bus stopped and die woman got up and lunged to die front, dragging die child, who wished to stay on, after her. Julian and his modier got up and followed. As diey neared die door, Julian tried to relieve her of her pocketbook.

"No," she murmured, "I want to give the little boy a nickel."

"No!" Julian hissed. "No!"

She smiled down at the child and opened her bag. The bus door opened and the woman picked him up by the arm and descended widi him, hanging at her hip. Once in the street she set him down and shook him.

Julian's mother had to close her purse while she got down the bus step but as soon as her feet were on die ground, she opened it again and began to rummage inside. "I can't find but a penny," she whispered, "but it looks like a new one."

"Don't do it!" Julian said fiercely between his teeth. There was a streetlight on the corner and she hurried to get under it so dbat she could better see into her pocketbook. The woman was heading off rapidly down die street widi the child still hanging backward on her hand.

"Oh little boy I" Julian's modier called and took a few quick steps and caught up widi them just beyond die lamppost. "Here's a bright new penny for you," and

she held out die coin, which, shone bronze in die dim light.

The huge woman turned and for a moment stood, her shoulders lifted and her face frozen with frustrated rage, and stared at Julian's mother. Then all at once she seemed to explode like a piece of machinery that had been given one ounce of pressure too much. Julian saw die black fist swing out with die red pocketbook. He shut his eyes and cringed as he heard the woman shout, "He don't take nobody's pennies!" When he opened his eyes, the woman was disappearing down the street widi the.little boy staring wide-eyed over her shoulder. Julian's modier was sitting on die sidewalk.

"I told you not to do that," Julian said angrily. "I told you not to do that!"

He stood over her for a minute, gritting his teedi. Her legs were stretched out in front of her and her hat was on her lap. He squatted down and looked her in the face. It was totally expressionless. "You got exactly what you deserved," he said. "Now get up."

He picked up her pocketbook and put what had fallen out back in it. He picked die hat up off her lap. The penny caught his eye on die sidewalk and he picked that up and let it drop before her eyes into the purse. Then he stood up and leaned over and held his hands out to pull her up. She remained immobile. He sighed. Rising above them on either side were black apartment buildings, marked with irregular rectangles of light. At the end of the block a man came out of a door and walked off in the opposite direction. "All right," he said, "suppose somebody happens by and wants to know why you're sitting on the sidewalk?"

She took the hand and, breathing hard, pulled heavily up on it and then stood for a moment, swaying slightly as if the spots of light in the darkness were circling around her. Her eyes, shadowed and confused, finally settled on his face. He did not try to conceal his irritation. "I hope this teaches you a lesson," he said. She leaned forward and her eyes raked his face. She seemed trying to determine his identity. Then, as if she found nothing familiar about him, she started off with a headlong movement in the wrong direction.

"Aren't you going on to the Y ?" he asked.

"Home," she muttered.

"Well, are we walking?"

For answer she kept going. Julian followed along, his hands behind him. He saw no reason to let the lesson she had had go without backing it up with an explanation of its meaning. She might as well be made to understand what had happened to her. "Don't think that was just an uppity Negro woman," he said. "That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies. That was your black double. She can wear the same hat as you, and to

be sure," he added gratuitously (because he thought it was funny), "it looked better on her than it did on you. What all this means," he said, "is that the old world is gone. The old manners are obsolete and your graciousness is not worth a damn." He thought bitterly of the house that had been lost for him. "You aren't who you think you are," he said.

She continued to plow ahead, paying no attention to him. Her hair had come undone on one side. She dropped her pocketbook and took no notice. He stooped and picked it up and handed it to her but she did not take it.

"You needn't act as if the world had come to an end," he said,

"because it hasn't. From now on you've got to live in a new world

and face a few realities for a change. Buck up," he said, "it won't

kill you."

She was breathing fast.

"Let's wait on the bus," he said.

"Home," she said thickly.

"I hate to see you behave like this," he said. "Just like a child. I should be able to expect more of you." He decided to stop where he was and make her stop and wait for a bus. "I'm not going any farther," he said, stopping. "We're going on the bus."

She continued to go on as if she had not heard him. He took a few steps and caught her arm and stopped her. He looked into her face and caught his breath. He was looking into a face he had never seen before. "Tell Grandpa to come get me," she said.

He stared, stricken.

"Tell Caroline to come get me," she said.

Stunned, he let her go and she lurched forward again, walking as if one leg were shorter dian the other. A tide of darkness seemed to be sweeping her from him. "MotherI" he cried. "Darling, sweetheart, wait!" Crumpling, she fell to the pavement. He dashed forward and fell at her side, crying, "Mamma, Mamma!" He turned her over. Her face was fiercely distorted. One eye, large and staring, moved slightly to the left as if it had become unmoored. The other remained fixed on him, raked his face again, found nodiing and closed.

"Wait here, wait here!" he cried and jumped up and began to run for help toward a cluster of lights he saw in the distance ahead of him. "Help, help!" he shouted, but his voice was thin, scarcely a thread of sound. The lights drifted farther away the faster he ran and his feet moved numbly as if they-carried him nowhere. The tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow.

The Partridge Festival

CALHOUN parked his small pod-shaped car in the driveway to his great-aunts' house and got out cautiously, looking to the right and left as if he expected the profusion of azalea blossoms to have a lethal effect upon him. Instead of a decent lawn, the old ladies had three terraces crammed with red and white azaleas, beginning at the sidewalk and running backwards to the very edge of their imposing unpainted house. The two of them were on the front porch, one sitting, the other standing. "Here's our baby!" his Aunt Bessie intoned in a voice meant to reach the other one, two feet away but deaf. It turned the head of a girl in the next yard, who sat cross-legged under a tree, reading. She raised her spectacled face, stared at Calhoun, and then returned her attention—with what he saw plainly was a smirk—to the book. Scowling, he passed stolidly on to the porch to get over the preliminaries with his aunts. They would take his voluntary presence in Partridge at Azalea Festival time to be a sign that his character was improving. They were box-jawed old ladies who looked like George Washington with his wooden teeth in. They wore black suits with large ruffled jabots and had dead-white hair pulled back. After each had embraced him, he dropped limply into a rocker and gave them a sheepish smile. He was here only because Singleton had captured his imagination, but he had told his Aunt Bessie over the telephone that he was coming to enjoy the festival. The deaf one, Aunt Mattie, shouted, "Your great-grandfather would have been delighted to see you taking an interest in the festival, Calhoun. He initiated it himself, you know."

"Well," die boy yelled back, "what about die little extra excitement you've had this time?"

Ten days before the festival began, a man named Singleton had been tried by a mock court on die courdiouse lawn for not buying an Azalea Festival Badge. During die trial he had been imprisoned in a pair of stocks and when convicted, he had been locked in die "jail" togedier widi a goat diat had been tried and convicted previously for the same offense. The "jail" was an outdoor privy borrowed for the occasion by die Jaycees. Ten days later, Singleton had appeared in a side door on the courdiouse porch and widi a silent automatic pistol, had shot five of die dignitaries seated there and by mistake one person in the crowd. The innocent man received die bullet intended for the mayor who at diat moment had reached down to pull up the tongue of his shoe.

"An unfortunate incident," his Aunt Mattie said. "It mars die festive spirit."

He heard the girl on the odier lawn slam her book. The top of her rose into

view above the hedge—a sloping-forward neck and a small face with a fierce expression, which she trained briefly on them before she disappeared. "It doesn't seem to have marred anything," he said. "As I passed dirough town I saw more people dian ever before and all die flags were up. Partridge," he shouted, "will bury its dead but will not lose a nickel." The girl's front door slammed in the middle of the sentence.

His Aunt Bessie had gone into die house and come out again with a small leather box. "You look very like Father," she said and pulled up her chair beside him.

Without enthusiasm Calhoun opened the box, which shed a rust-colored dust over his knees, and removed die miniature of his greatgrandfadier. He was shown diis every time he came. The old man—round-faced, bald, altogether unremarkable-looking—sat widi his hands knotted on die head of a black stick. His expression was all innocence and determination. The master merchant, die boy thought, and flinched. "And what would diis stalwart wordiy dunk of Partridge today," he asked wryly, "with its festival in full swing after six citizens have been shot?"

"Father was progressive," his Aunt Bessie said, "—die most forward-looking merchant Partridge ever had. He would eidier have been one of the prominent men shot or he would have been the one to subdue the maniac."

The boy did not know how much of this he could stand. In the paper diere had been pictures of die six "victims" and one of Singleton. Singleton's was the only distinctive face in the lot. It was broad but bony and bleak. One eye was more nearly round dian the other and in the more nearly round one Calhoun had recognized the composure of the man who knows he will and who is willing to suffer for die right to be himself. A calculating contempt lurked in die regular eye but in die general expression diere was the tortured look of the man who becomes maddened finally by die madness around him. The odier six faces were of the same general stamp as bis great-grandfadier's.

"As you get older, you'll look more and more like Father," his Aunt Mattie prophesied. "You have his ruddy complexion and much the same expression."

"I'm a different type entirely," he said stiffly.

"Peaches and cream," his Aunt Bessie guffawed. "You're getting a little pot-tummy too," she said and took a lunge at his middle widi her fist. "How old is our baby now?"

"Twenty-three," he muttered, diinking that it could not go on like this for the whole visit, that once they had roughed him up a bit, diey would leave off.

"And do you have a girl?" his Aunt Mattie asked. "No," he said wearily. "I take it," he went on, "that around here Singleton is considered nothing but a mental

case?" "Yes," his Aunt Bessie said, "—peculiar. He never conformed. He was not like the rest of us here."

"A terrible drawback," die boy said. Though his eyes were not mismatched, the shape of his face was broad like Singleton's; but die real likeness between them was interior.

"Since he is insane, he is not responsible," his Aunt Bessie said.

The boy's eyes brightened. He sat forward and fixed the old lady widi a narrow gaze. "And where then," he asked, "does die real guilt lie?"

'Tadier's head was as smooth as an infant's by die time he was thirty," she said. "You had better hurry and get you a girl. Ha ha. What are you going to do with yourself now?"

He reached into his pocket and withdrew his pipe and a sack o£ tobacco. You could not ask them questions in depth. They were both good low-church Episcopalians but they had amoral imaginations. "I think I shall write," he said and began to load the bowl.

"Well," his Aunt Bessie said, "that's fine. Maybe you'll be another Margaret Mitchell."

"I hope you'll do us justice," his Aunt Mattie shouted. "Few do."

"I'll do you justice all right," he said grimly. "I'm writing an expos. . . ." He stopped and put the pipe in his mouth and sat back. It would be ridiculous to tell *them.* He removed the pipe and said, "Well, that's too much to go into. It wouldn't interest you ladies."

His Aunt Bessie inclined her head significantly. "Calhoun," she aaid, "we wouldn't want to be disappointed in you." They eyed him as if it had just occurred to them that the pet snake they had been fondling might after all be poisonous.

"Know the truth," the boy said with his fiercest look, "and the truth shall make you free." They appeared reassured at his quoting Scripture. "Isn't he sweet," his Aunt Mattie asked, "with his little pipe?" "Better get you a girl, boy," his Aunt Bessie said.

He escaped them in a few minutes and took his bag upstairs and then came down again, ready to go out and immerse himself in his material. His intention was to spend the afternoon interviewing people about Singleton. He expected to write something that would vindicate the madman and he expected the writing of it to mitigate his own guilt, for his doubleness, his shadow, was cast before him more darkly than usual in the light of Singleton's purity.

For the three summer months of the year, he lived with his parents and sold

air-conditioners, boats, and refrigerators so that for the other nine months he could afford to meet life naturally and bring his real self—the rebel-artist-mystic—to birth. During these other months he lived on the opposite side of the city in an unheated walk-up with two other boys who also did nothing. But guilt for the summer pursued him into the winter; the fact was, he could have fared without the orgy of selling he cast himself into in the summer.

When he had explained to them that he despised their values, his parents had looked at each other with a gleam of recognition as if this were what they had been expecting from what they had read, and his father had offered to give him a small allowance to finance the flat. He had refused it for the sake of his independence, but in the depths of himself, he knew it was not for his independence but because he *enjoyed* selling. In the face of a customer, he was carried outside himself; his face began to beam and sweat and all complexity left him; he was in the grip of a drive as strong as the drive of some men for liquor or a woman; and he was horribly good at it. He was so good at it that the company had given him an achievement scroll. He had put quotation marks around the word *achievement* and he and his friends used the scroll as a target for darts.

As soon as he had seen Singleton's picture in the paper, the face began to burn in his imagination like a dark reproachful liberating star. The next morning he had telephoned his aunts to expect him and he had driven the hundred and fifty miles to Partridge in a little short of four hours.

On his way out of the house, his Aunt Bessie halted him and said, "Be back by six, Baby Lamb, and we'll have a sweet surprise for you."

"Rice pudding?" he asked. They were terrible cooks. "Sweeter by far!" the old lady said and rolled her eyes. He hastened away.

The girl next door had returned with her book to the lawn. He suspected that he might be supposed to know her. When he came for visits as a child, his aunts had always produced one of the neighbor's freak children to play with him—once a fat moron in a Girl Scout suit, another time a near-sighted boy who recited Bible verses, and another an almost square girl who had blackened his eye and left. He thanked God he was now grown and they would no longer dare to fill his time for him. The girl did not look up as he passed and he did not speak.

Once on the sidewalk, he was affected by the profusion of azaleas.
They seemed to wash in tides of color across the lawns until they surged against the white house-fronts, crests of pink and crimson, crests of white and a mysterious shade that was not yet lavender, wild crests of yellow-red. The

profusion of color almost stopped his breath with insidious pleasure. Moss hung from the old trees. The houses were the most picturesque types of run-down ante-bellum. The taint of the place was expressed in his great-grandfather's words which had survived as the town's motto: Beauty is Our Money Crop.

His aunts lived five blocks from the business section. He walked them quickly and came after a few minutes to the edge of the bare commercial scene, which had the ramshackle courthouse for its center. The sun beat down fiercely on the tops of cars parked in every available space. Flags, national, state and confederate, flapped on every corner street light. People milled about. On the quiet shaded street where his aunts lived and the azaleas were best, he had not passed three people, but here they all were, staring avidly at the pathetic store displays and moving with languid reverence past the courthouse porch, the spot where blood had been spilled.

He wondered if any of them might think he was here for the same reason they were. He would have liked to start, in Socratic fashion, a street discussion about where the real guilt for *the* six deaths lay, but as he surveyed the scene, he saw no one who looked capable of any genuine interest in meaning. Without set purpose, he entered a drugstore. The place was dark and smelled of sour vanilla.

He sat down on the high stool at the counter and ordered a limeade. The boy preparing the drink had elaborate red sideburns and wore on his shirtfront an Azalea Festival Badge—the emblem which Singleton had refused to buy. Calhoun's eye fell on it at once. "I see you've paid your tribute to the god," he said.

The boy did not seem to get the significance of this.

"The badge," Calhoun said, "the badge."

The boy looked down at it and then back at Calhoun. He put the drink on the counter and continued to look at him as if he were serving someone with an interesting deformity.

"Arc you enjoying the festive spirit?" Calhoun asked.

"All these doings?" the boy said.

"These grand events," Calhoun said, "commencing with, I believe, six deaths."

"Yessir," the boy said, "six in cold blood. And I knew four of them myself."

"You too have had your share of the glory then," Calhoun said. He felt suddenly a distinct hush fall on the street outside. He turned his eyes to the door just in time to see a hearse pass, followed by a line of slowly moving cars.

"That's the man that's having his funeral to himself," the boy said reverently. "The five that were supposed to get shot had theirs yesterday. One big one. But he didn't die in time for it."

"They have innocent as well as guilty blood on their hands," Calhoun said and

glared at the boy. "It wasn't no *they,"* the boy said. "One man done it all. A man named Singleton. He was bats."

"Singleton was only the instrument," Calhoun said. "Partridge itself is guilty." He finished his drink in a gulp and put down the glass.

The boy was looking at him as if he were mad. "Patridge can't shoot nobody," he said in a high exasperated voice.

Calhoun put his dime on the counter and left. The last car had turned at the end of the block. He thought he observed less activity. People had obviously hastened away at the sight of the hearse. Two doors from him an old man leaned out of a hardware store and glared up the street where the procession had disappeared. Calhoun's need to communicate was urgent. He approached diffidently. "I understand that was the last funeral," he said.

The old man put a hand behind his ear. "The funeral of the innocent man," Calhoun shouted and nodded up the street. The old man cleared his nostrils loudly. His expression was not affable. "The only bullet that went right," he said in a rasping voice.

•'Biller was a wastrel. Drunk at the time." The boy scowled. "I suppose the other five were heroes?" he sug
gested archly. "Fine men," the old man said. "Perished in the line of duty. We givem a hero's fu'nel—all five in one big service. Biller's folks tried to rush up the undertaker so they could get Biller in on it but we saw to it Biller didn't make it. Would have been a disgrace."

My God, die boy thought.

"The only thing Singleton ever did good was to rid us of Biller," the old man continued. "Now somebody ought to rid us of Singleton. There he is at Quincy, living in the laper luxury, laying in a cool bed at no expense, eating up your taxes and mine. They should have shot him on the spot."

This was so appalling that Calhoun was speechless. "Going to keep him there, they ought to charge him board," the old man said.

With a contemptuous glance, the boy walked off. He crossed the street to die courthouse square, moving at an odd angle in order to put as much distance between himself and the old fool as quickly as possible. Here benches were scatterd beneath the trees. He found an unoccupied one and sat down. To the side of the courthouse steps, several viewers stood admiring die "jail" where Singleton had been locked with the goat. The padios of his friend's situation was borne in on him with a rush of empathy. He felt himself flung in die privy, die padlock clicked, he glared between the rotting planks at the fools howling and

cavorting outside. The goat made an obscene noise; he saw diat he was confined widi the spirit of the community.

"Six men was shot here," an odd muffled voice close by said.

The boy jumped.

A small white girl whose tongue was curled in die moutii of a Coca-Cola bottle was sitting in a patch of sand at his feet, watching him widi a detached gaze. Her eyes were the same green as die bottle. She was barefooted and had straight white hair. She withdrew her tongue from the bottle with an explosive sound. "A bad man did it," she said.

The boy felt the kind of frustration diat accompanies contact widi the certainty of children. "No," he said, "he was not a bad man."

The child put her tongue back in the bottle and wididrew it silendy, her eyes on him.

"People were not good to him," he explained. "They were mean to him. They were cruel. What would you do if someone were cruel to you?"

"Shoot diem," she said.

"Well, diat's what he did," Calhoun said, frowning.

She continued to sit there and did not take her eyes off him. Her gaze might have been die depthless gaze of Partridge itself.

"You people persecuted him and finally drove him mad," the boy said. "He wouldn't buy a badge. Was that a crime? He was die Outsider here and you couldn't stand that. One of die fundamental rights of man," he said, glaring dirough the child's transparent stare, "is the right not to behave like a fool. The right to be different," he said hoarsely, "My God. The right to be yourself."

Without taking her eyes off him, she lifted one of her feet and set it on her knee.

"He was a bad bad bad man," she said.

Calhoun got up and walked off, glaring in front of him. His indignation swathed his vision in a kind of haze. He saw none of die activity around him distinctly. Two high school girls in bright skirts and jackets swung into his path and shrilled, "Buy a ticket for die beauty contest tonight. See who'll be Miss Partridge Azalea!" He swerved sharply to the side and did not dirow diem so much as a glance. Their giggles followed him until he was past the courthouse and onto the block behind it. He stood there a moment, undecided what he would do next. He faced a barber shop which looked empty and cool. After a moment he entered it.

The barber, alone in the shop, raised his head from behind die paper he was reading. Calhoun asked for a haircut and sat down gratefully in die chair.

The barber was a tall emaciated fellow with eyes that might have faded from some deeper color. He looked to be a man who had suffered himself. He put die bib on the boy and stood staring at his round head as if it were a pumpkin he was wondering how to slice. **Then** he twirled die chair so diat Calhoun faced die mirror. He was confronted with an image diat was round-faced, unremarkable-looking and innocent. The boy's expression turned fierce. "Are you eating up this slop like die rest of them?" he asked belligerendy.

"Come again?" the barber said.

"Do the tribal rites going on here improve the barber trade? All these doings, all these doings," he said impatiently.

"Well," the barber said, "last year it was a thousand extra people here and this year it looks to be more—on account," he said, "of the tragedy."

"The tragedy," the boy repeated and stretched his mouth.

"The six that was shot," the barber said.

"That tragedy," the boy said. "And what about the other tragedy —the man who was persecuted by these idiots until he shot six of them?"

"Oh him," the barber said.

"Singleton," the boy said. "Did he patronize your place?"

The barber began clipping his hair. A peculiar expression of disdain had come over his face at the mention of the name. "Tonight it's a beauty contest," he said, "tomorrow night it's a band concert, Thursday afternoon it's a big parade with Miss. . . ."

"Did you or didn't you know Singleton?" Calhoun interrupted.

"Known him well," the barber said and shut his mouth.

A tremor went through die boy as he realized tiiat Singleton had probably sat in the chair he himself was now sitting in. He searched his face in the mirror desperately for its hidden likeness to die man. Slowly he saw it appear, a secret message brought to light by die heat of his feelings. "Did he patronize your shop?" he asked and held his breath for the answer.

"Him and me was related by marriage," the barber said indignantly, "but he never come in here.-He was too big a skinflint to have his hair cut. He cut his own."

"An unpardonable crime," Calhoun said in a high voice.

"His second cousin married my sister-in-law," the barber said, "but he never known me on die street. Pass him as close as I am to you and he'd keep going. Kept his eye on die ground all die time like he was following a bug."

"Preoccupied," the boy muttered. "He doubtless didn't know you

were on the street."

"He known it," the barber said and his moudi curled unpleasantly. "He known it. I clip hair and he clipped coupons and that was that. I clip hair," he repeated as if diis sentence had a particularly satisfying ring to his ears, "and he clipped coupons."

The typical have-not psychology, Calhoun thought. "Was the Singleton family once wealthy?" he asked.

"It wasn't but half of him Singleton," the barber said, "and the Singleton's claimed there wasn't none of him Singleton. One of the Singleton girls gone off on a nine-months vacation and come back with him. Then they all died off and left him their money. It's no telling what the other half of him is. Something foreign I would judge." His tone insinuated more.

"I begin to get the picture," Calhoun said.

"He ain't clipping no coupons now," said the barber.

"No," Calhoun said and his voice rose, "now he's suffering. He's die scapegoat. He's laden with the sins of the community. Sacrificed for the guilt of others."

The barber paused, his mouth partway open. After a moment he said in a more respectful voice, "Reverend, you got him wrong. He wasn't a church-going man."

The boy reddened. "I'm not a church-going man myself," he said. The barber seemed stopped again. He stood holding the scissors uncertainly.

"He was an individualist," Calhoun said. "A man who would not allow himself to be pressed into the mold of his inferiors. A non-conformist. He was a man of depth living among caricatures and diey finally drove him mad, unleashed all his violence on themselves. Observe," he continued, "that they didn't try him. They simply had him committed at once to Quincy. Why? Because," he said, "a trial would have brought out his essential innocence and die real guilt of the community."

The barber's face lightened. "You're a lawyer, ain't you?" he asked.

"No," the boy said sullenly. "I'm a writer."

"Ohhh," the barber murmured. "I known it must be something like that." After a moment he said, "What you written?" "He never married?" Calhoun went on rudely. "He lived alone in die Singleton place in the country?"

"What tiiere was of it," the barber said. "He wouldn't have spent a nickel to keep it from falling down and no woman wouldn't have had him. That was tiie one thing he always had to pay for," he said and made a vulgar noise in his cheek.

"You know because you were always there," die boy said, barely able to control his disgust for this bigot.

"Naw," the barber said, "it was just common knowledge. I clip hair," he said, "but I don't live like a hog, I got plumbing in my house and a refrigerator that spits ice cubes into my wife's hand."

"He was not a materialist," Calhoun said. "There were doings that meant more to him than plumbing. Independence, for instance."

"Ha," the barber snorted. "He wasn't so independent. Once lightning almost struck him and those diat saw it said you should have seen him run. Took off like bees were swarming in his pants. They liked to died laughing," and he gave a hyena-like laugh himself and slapped his knee.

"Loadisome," die boy murmured.

"Another time," the barber continued, "somebody went out there and put a dead cat in his well. Somebody was always doing something to see if they could make him turn loose a little money. Anodier time . . ."

Calhoun began righting his way out of tlie bib as if it were a net he was caught in. When he was free of it, he thrust his hand in his pocket and brought out a dollar which he flung on die startled barber's shelf. Then he made for the door, letting it slam behind him in judgment on the place.

The walk back to his aunts' did not calm him. The colors of die azaleas had deepened with the approach of sundown and the trees rustled protectively over the old houses." No one here had a thought for Singleton, who lay on a cot in a filthy ward at Quincy. The boy felt now in a concrete way tlie force of his innocence, and he thought that to do justice to all the man had suffered, he would have to write more than a simple article. He would have to write a novel; he would have to show, not say, how primary injustice operated. Preoccupied with this, he went four doors past his aunts' house and had to turn and go back.

His Aunt Bessie met him at die door and drew him into die

hall. "Told you we'd have a sweet surprise for you!" she said, pull

ing him by the arm into the parlor.

On the sofa sat a rangy-looking girl in a lime-green dress. "You remember Mary Elizabeth," his Aunt Mattie said, "—the cute little trick you took to the picture show once when you were here." Through his rage he recognized the girl who had been reading under the tree. "Mary Elizabeth is home for her spring holidays," his Aunt Mattie said. "Mary Elizabeth is a real scholar, aren't you, Mary Elizabeth?"

Mary Elizabeth scowled, indicating she was indifferent to whether she was a real scholar or not. She gave him a look which told him plainly she expected to enjoy this no more than he did.

His Aunt Mattie gripped the knob of her cane and began to lift herself from her chair. "We're going to have supper early," the other one said, "because Mary Elizabeth is going to take you to the beauty contest and it begins at seven."

"Great," the boy said in a tone that would be lost on them but he hoped not on Mary Elizabeth.

Throughout the meal he ignored the girl completely. His repartee with his aunts was markedly cynical but they did not have sense enough to understand his allusions and laughed like idiots at everything he said. Twice they called him "Baby Lamb" and the girl smirked. Otherwise she did nothing to suggest she was enjoying herself. Her round face was still childish behind her glasses. Retarded, Calhoun thought.

When the meal was over and they were on the way to the beauty contest, they continued to say nothing to each other. The girl, who was several inches taller than he, walked slightly in advance of him as if she would like to lose him on the way, but after two blocks she stopped abruptly and began to rummage in a large grass bag she carried. She took out a pencil and held it between her teeth while she continued to rummage. After a minute she brought up from the bottom of the bag two tickets and a stenographer's note pad. With these out, she closed the pocketbook and walked on.

"Are you going to take notes?" Calhoun inquired in a tone heavy with irony. The girl looked around as if trying to identify the speaker. "Yes," she said, "I'm going to take notes." "You appreciate this sort of thing?" Calhoun asked in the same tone. "You enjoy it?"

"It makes me vomit," she said, "I'm going to finish it off with one swift literary kick."

The boy looked at her blankly.

"Don't let me interfere with your pleasure in it," she said, "but diis whole place is false and rotten to the core." Her voice came with a hiss of indignation. "They prostitute azaleas!"

Calhoun was astounded. After a moment he recovered himself. "It takes no great mind to come to that conclusion," he said haughtily. "What requires insight is finding a way to transcend it."

"You mean a form to express it in."

"It comes to the same tiling," he said.

They walked the next two blocks in silence but both appeared shaken. When the courthouse was in view they crossed the street to it and Mary Elizabeth stuck the tickets at a boy who stood beside an entrance that had been formed by roping in die rest of die square. People were beginning to assemble on

die grass inside.

"And do we stand here while you take notes?" Calhoun asked.

The girl stopped and faced him. "Look, Baby Lamb," she said, "you can do what you please. I'm going up to my fadier's office in the building where I can work. You can stay down here and help select Miss Partridge Azalea if you want to."

"I shall come," he said, controlling himself, "I'd like to observe a great female writer taking notes."

"Suit yourself," she said.

He followed her up the courthouse steps and through a side door. His irritation was so extreme that he did not realize he had passed through die very door where Singleton had stood to shoot. They walked through an empty barnlike hall and silently up a flight of tobacco-stained steps into anotlier barnlike hall. Mary Elizabeth rooted in the grass bag for a key and then unlocked the door to her father's office. They entered a large threadbare room lined with lawbooks. As if he were an incompetent, die girl dragged two straight chairs from one wall to a window tiiat overlooked die porch. Then she sat down and stared out, apparently absorbed at once in die scene below.

Calhoun sat down in die other chair. To annoy her he began to look her over dioroughly. For what seemed at least five minutes, he did not take his eyes off her as she leaned with her elbows in the window. He stared at her so long that he was afraid her image would be etched forever on his retina. Finally he could stand the silence no longer. "What is your opinion of Singleton?" he asked abruptly.

She raised her head and appeared to look through him. "A Christ-figure," she said.

The boy was stunned.

"I mean as myth," she said scowling. "I'm not a Christian." She returned her attention to the scene outside. Below a bugle sounded. "Sixteen girls in bathing suits are about to appear," she drawled. "Surely this will be of interest to you?"

"Listen," Calhoun said fiercely, "get this through your head. I'm not interested in the damn festival or the damn azalea queen. I'm here only because of my sympathy for Singleton. I'm going to write about him. Possibly a novel."

"I intend to write a non-fiction study," the girl said in a tone that made it evident fiction was beneath her.

They looked at each other with open and intense dislike. Calhoun felt that if he probed sufficiently he would expose her essential shallowness. "Since our

forms are different," he said, again with his ironical smile, "we might compare findings."

"It's quite simple," the girl said. "He was the scapegoat. While Partridge flings itself about selecting Miss Partridge Azalea, Singleton suffers at Quincy. He expiates . . .'"

"I don't mean your abstract findings," the boy said. "I mean your concrete findings. Have you ever seen him? What did he look like? The novelist is not interested in narrow abstractions—particularly when they're obvious. He's . . ."

"How many novels have you written?" she asked.

"This will be my first," he said coldly. "Have you ever seen him?"

"No," she said, "that isn't necessary for me. What he looks like makes no difference—whether he has brown eyes or blue—that's nothing to a thinker." "You are probably," he said, "afraid to look at him. The novelist is never afraid to look at the real object." "I would not be afraid to look at him," the girl said angrily, "if it were at all necessary. Whether he has brown eyes or blue is nothing to me."

"There is more to it," Calhoun said, "than whether he has brown eyes or blue. You might find your theories enriched by the sight of him. And I don't mean by finding out the color of his eyes. I mean your existential encounter with his personality. The mystery of personality," he said, "is what interests the artist. Life does not abide in abstractions."

"Then what's keeping you from going and having a look at him?" she said. "What are you asking me what he looks like for? Go see for yourself."

The words fell on his head like a sack of rocks. After a moment he said, "Go see for yourself? Go see where?"

"At Quincy," the girl said. "Where do you think?"

"They wouldn't let me see him," he said. The suggestion was appalling to him; for some reason he could not at the moment understand, it struck him as unthinkable. "They would if you said you were kin to him," she said. "It's only twenty miles from here. What's to stop you?"

He was about to say, "I'm not kin to him," but he stopped and reddened furiously on the edge of the betrayal. They were spiritual kin.

"Go see whether his eyes are brown or blue and have yourself a little old exis . . ." "I take it," he said, "that if I go you would like to go along? Since you aren't afraid to see him." The girl paled. "You won't go," she said. "You're not up to the old exis . . ."

"I will go," he said, seeing his opportunity to shut her up. "And if

you care to go with me, you can be at my aunts' at nine in the morn ing. But I doubt," he added, "that I'll see you there."

She thrust forward her long neck and glared at him. "Oh yes you will," she said. "You'll see me there."

She returned her attention to the window and Calhoun looked at nothing. Each seemed sunk suddenly in some mammoth private problem. Raucus cheers came intermittently from outside. Every few minutes there was music and clapping but neither took any notice of it, or of each other. Finally the girl pulled away from the window and said, "If you've got the general idea, we can leave. I prefer to go home and read."

"I had the general idea before I came," Calhoun said.

He saw her to her door and when he had left her, his spirits lifted dizzily for an instant and then collapsed. He knew that die idea of going to see Singleton would never have occurred to him alone. It would be a torturing experience, but it might be his salvation. The sight of Singleton in his misery might cause him suffering sufficient to raise him once and for all from his commercial instincts. Selling was the only thing he had proved himself good at; yet it was impossible for him to believe that every man was not created equally an artist if he could but suffer and achieve it. As for the girl, he doubted if the sight of Singleton would do anything for her. She had that particular repulsive fanaticism peculiar to smart children—all brain and no emotion.

He spent a restless night, dreaming in snatches of Singleton. At one point he dreamed he was driving to Quincy to sell Singleton a refrigerator. When he awoke in the morning, a slow rain was descending indifferently. He turned his head to the gray window pane. He could not remember what he had dreamed but he sensed it had been unpleasant. A vision of the girl's flat face came to him. He thought of Quincy and saw rows and rows of low red buildings with rough heads sticking out of barred windows. He tried to concentrate on Singleton but his mind shied from the thought. He did not wish to go to Quincy. He remembered that it was a novel he was going to write. His desire to write a novel had gone down overnight like a defective tire.

While he lay in bed, the drizzle turned into a steady downpour. The rain might keep the girl from coming, or at least she might dunk she could use it as an excuse. He decided to wait until exactly nine o'clock and if she had not shown up by then to be off. He would not go to Quincy but would go home. It would be better to see Singleton at a later date when he would perhaps have responded to treatment. He got up and wrote the girl a note to be left with his aunts, saying he presumed she had decided, upon consideration, that she was not equal to the

experience. It was a very concise note and he ended it, "Cordially yours."

She arrived at five minutes to nine and stood dripping in his aunts' hall, a tubular bundle of baby-blue plastic from which nothing showed but her face. She was holding a damp paper sack and her large mouth was twisted in an uncertain smile. Overnight she had apparently lost some of her self-assurance.

Calhoun was barely able to be polite. His aunts, who thought this was a romantic outing in the rain, kissed him out the door and stood on the porch idotically waving their handkerchiefs until he and Mary Elizabeth were in the car and gone.

The girl was much too big for the small car. She kept shifting about and twisting inside her raincoat. "The rain has beat the azaleas down," she observed in a neutral tone.

Calhoun rudely kept silent. He was trying to obliterate her from his consciousness so that he could reestablish Singleton diere. He had lost Singleton completely. The rain was coming down in gray swaths. When they reached the highway, they could barely see across die fields to a faint line of woods. The girl kept leaning forward, squinting into the opaque windshield. "If a truck were to come out of that," she said with a gawkish laugh, "that would be the end of us."

Calhoun stopped the car. "I'll be glad to take you back and go on by myself," he said.

"I have to go," she said hoarsely, staring at him. "I have to see him." Behind her spectacles, her eyes appeared larger than diey should have been and suspiciously liquid. "I have to face this," she said.

Roughly, he started the car again.

"You have to prove to yourself that you can stand there and watch a man be crucified," she said. "You have to go through it with him. I thought about it all night."

"It may give you," Calhoun muttered, "a more balanced view of life." "This is personal," she said. "You wouldn't understand," and she turned her head to the window. Calhoun tried to concentrate on Singleton. Feature by feature, he brought the face together in his mind and each time he had it almost constructed, it fell apart and he was left with nothing. He drove in silence, at a reckless speed as if he would like to hit a hole in the road and see the girl go through the windshield. Every now and then she blew her nose weakly. After fifteen miles or so the rain slackened and stopped. The treeline on either side of them became black and clear and the fields intensely green. They would have an unmistakable view of the hospital grounds as soon as these should come in sight.

"Christ only had to take it three hours," the girl said all at once in a high voice,

"but he'll be in this place the rest of his life!"

Calhoun cut his eyes toward her. There was a fresh wet line down the side of her face. He turned his eyes away, awed and furious. "If you can't stand this," he said, "I can still take you home and come back by myself."

"You wouldn't come back by yourself," she said, "and we're almost there." She blew her nose. "I want him to know that somebody takes his side. I want to say that to him no matter what it does to me."

Through his rage, the terrible thought occurred to the boy that he would have to *say* something to Singleton. What could he say to him in die presence of this woman? She had shattered the communion between them. "We've come to listen I hope you understand," he burst out, "I haven't driven all this way to hear you starde Singleton widi your wisdom. I've come to listen *to him."*

"We should have brought a tape recorder!" she cried, "then we'd have what he says all our lives!" "You don't have elementary understanding," Calhoun said, "if you think you approach a man like this with a tape recorder."

"Stop!" she shrieked, leaning toward the windshield, "mat's it!"

Calhoun slammed on his brakes and looked forward wildly.

A cluster of low buildings, hardly noticeable, rose like a rich growth of warts on the hill to their right.

The boy sat helpless while the car, as if of its own volition, turned and headed toward the entrance. The letters QUINCY STATE HOSPITAL were cut in a concrete arch which it rolled effortlessly through.

"Abandon hope all ye who enter here," the girl murmured.

They had to stop within a hundred yards of tiie gate while a fat white-capped nurse led a line of patients, straggling like elderly schoolchildren, across the road in front of tiiem. A snaggle-toothed woman in a candy-striped dress and black wool hat shook her fist at them, and a baldheaded man waved energetically. A few threw malevolent looks as the line shuffled off across the green to another building.

After a moment the car rolled forward again. "Park in front of that center building," Mary Elizabeth directed.

"They won't let us see him," he mumbled.

"Not if you have anything to do with it," she said. "Park and let me out. I'll handle this." Her cheek had dried and her voice was businesslike. He parked and she got out. He watched her disappear into the building, thinking with grim satisfaction that she would soon turn into a full-grown ogre—false intellect, false emotions, maximum efficiency, all operating to produce the dominant hair-splitting Ph.D. Another line of patients passed in the road and several of them

pointed at the small car. Calhoun did not look but he sensed he was being watched. "Hup up there," he heard the nurse say.

He looked again and gave a little cry. A gentle face, wrapped around with a green hand towel, was in his window, smiling toothlessly but with an agonizing tenderness.

"Get a move on, sweetie," the nurse said and the face retreated.

The boy rolled his window up rapidly but his heart was wrenched. He saw again the agonized face in the stocks—the slightly mismatched eyes, the wide mouth parted in a stifled useless cry. The vision lasted only a moment but when it passed, he was certain that the sight of Singleton was going to effect a change in him, that after this visit, some strange tranquility he had not before conceived of would be his. He sat for ten minutes with his eyes closed, knowing that a revelation was near and trying to prepare himself for it.

All at once the car door opened and the girl folded herself, pant

ing, in beside him. Her face was pale. She held up two green per

mission slips and pointed to the names written on them: Calhoun

Singleton on one, Mary Elizabeth Singleton on die other. For a

moment tiiey stared at the slips, tiien at each other. Botii appeared to recognize that in their common kinship with him, a kinship with each other was unavoidable. Generously, Calhoun held out his hand. She shook it. "He's in the fifth building to the left," she said.

They drove to the fifth building and parked. It was a low red brick structure witii barred windows, like all the others except that the outside of it was streaked with black stains. In one window two hands hung out, palms downward. Mary Elizabeth opened the paper sack she had brought and began to take out presents for Singleton. She had brought a box of candy, a carton of cigarettes and three books—a Modern Library *Thus Spa\e Zarathustra*, a paperback *Revolt of the Masses*, and a thin decorated volume of Housman. She handed the cigarettes and the candy to Calhoun and got out of the car with the books herself. She started forward, but halfway to the door she stopped and put her hand to her mouth. "I can't take it," she murmured.

"Now now," Calhoun said kindly. He put his hand on her back and gave her a slight push and she began to move forward again.

They entered a stained linoleum-covered hall where a peculiar odor met them at once like an invisible official. There was a desk facing the door, behind which sat a frail harrassed-looking nurse whose eyes darted to right and left as if she expected ultimately to be hit from behind. Mary Elizabeth handed her the two green permits. The woman looked at them and groaned. "Go in yonder and wait," she said in a weary insult-bearing voice. "He'll have to be got ready. They

shouldn't have give you these slips over there. What do they know about what goes on over here over there and what do them doctors care anyhow? If it was up to me the ones that don't cooperate wouldn't see nobody."

"We're his kin," Calhoun said. "We have every right to see him." The nurse threw her head back in a soundless laugh and went off muttering.

Calhoun put his hand on the girl's back again and guided her into the waiting room where they sat down close together on a mammoth black leather sofa which faced an identical piece of furniture five feet away. There was nothing else in the room but a rickety table in one corner with an empty white vase on it. A barred window cast squares of damp light on the floor at their feet. There seemed an intense stillness about them although the place was anything but quiet. From one end of the building came a continuous mourning sound as delicate as the fluttering wail of owls; at the other end they heard rocketing peals of laughter. Closer at hand, a steady montonous cursing broke the silence around it with a machine-like regularity. Each noise seemed to exist isolated from every other.

The two sat together as if they were waiting for some momentous event in their lives—a marriage or instantaneous deaths. They seemed already joined in a predestined convergence. At the same instant each made an involuntary motion as if to run but it was too late. Heavy footsteps were almost at the door and the machine-like curses were bearing down.

Two burly attendants entered with Singleton spider-like between them. He was holding his feet high up off the floor so that the atendants had to carry him. It was from him the curses were coming. He had on a hospital gown of the type that opens and ties up the back and his feet were stuck in black shoes from which the laces had been removed. On his head was a black hat, not the kind countrymen wear, but a black derby hat such as might be worn by a gunman in the movies. The two attendants came up to the empty sofa from behind and swung him over the back of it, then still holding him, each passed around the sofa arms and sat down beside him, grinning. They might have been twins for though one was blond and the other bald, they had identical looks of good-natured stupidity.

As for Singleton, he fixed Calhoun with his green slightly mismatched eyes. "Whadaya want with me?" he shrilled. "Speak up! My time is valuable." They were almost exactly the eyes that Calhoun had seen in the paper, except that the penetrating gleam in them had a slight reptilian quality.

The boy sat mesmerized.

After a moment, Mary Elizabeth said in a slow, hoarse, barely

audible voice, "We came to say we understand."

The old man's glare shifted to her and for one instant his eyes remained absolutely still like the eyes of a treetoad that has sighted its prey. His throat appeared to swell. "Ahhh," he said as if he had just swallowed something pleasant, "eeeee."

"Mind out now, dad," one of the attendants said.

"Lemme sit with her," Singleton said and jerked his arm away from the attendant, who caught it again at once. "She knows what she wants."

"Let him sit with her," the blond attendant said, "she's his niece." "No," the bald one said, "keep aholt to him. He's liable to pull off his frock. You know *him."*

But the other one had already let one of his wrists loose and Singleton was leaning outward toward Mary Elizabeth, straining away from die attendant who held him. The girl's eyes were glazed The old man began to make suggestive noises through his teeth.

"Now now, dad," die idle attendant said.

"It's not every girl gets a chance at me," Singleton said. "Listen here, sister, I'm well-fixed. There's nobody in Partridge I can't skin. I own the place—as well as this hotel." His hand grasped toward her knee.

The girl gave a small stifled cry.

"And I got others elsewhere," he panted. "You and me are two of a kind. We ain't in their class. You're a queen. I'll put you on a float!" and at that moment he got his wrist free and lunged toward her but bodi attendants sprang after him instantly. As Mary Elizabeth crouched against Calhoun, the old man jumped nimbly over the sofa and began to speed around the room. The attendants, their arms and legs held wide apart to catch him, tried to close in on him from eitJier side. They almost had him when he kicked off his shoes and leaped between them onto the table, sending the empty vase shattering to die floor. "Look girl!" he shrilled and began to pull die hospital gown over his head.

Mary Elizabeth was already dashing out the room and Calhoun ran behind her and thrust open die door just in time to prevent her crashing into it. They scrambled into die car and the boy drove it away as if his heart were the motor and would never go fast enough. The sky was bone-white and the slick highway stretched before diem like a piece of the earth's exposed nerve. After five miles Calhoun pulled die car to die side of the road and stopped from exhaustion. They sat silently, looking at nothing until finally they turned and looked at each other. There each saw at once die likeness of their kinsman and flinched. They looked away and dien back, as if with concentration they might find a more tolerable image. To Calhoun, the girl's face seemed to mirror the nakedness of the sky. In

despair he leaned closer until he was stopped by a miniature visage which rose incorrigibly in her spectacles and fixed him where he was. Round, innocent, undistinguished as an iron link, it was the face whose gift of life had pushed straight forward to the future to raise festival after festival. Like a master salesman, it seemed to have been waiting there from all time to claim him.

The Lame Shall Enter First

SHEPPARD sat on a stool at the bar that divided die kitchen in half, eating his cereal out of the individual pasteboard box it came in. He ate mechanically, his eyes on the child, who was wandering from cabinet to cabinet in the panelled kitchen, collecting the ingredients for his breakfast. He was a stocky blond boy of ten. Sheppard kept his intense blue eyes fixed on him. The boy's future was written in his face. He would be a banker. No, worse. He would operate a small loan company. All he wanted for die child was diat he be good and unselfish and neither seemed likely. Sheppard was a young man whose hair was already white. It stood up like a narrow brush halo over his pink sensitive face. The boy approached the bar with die jar of peanut butter under his arm, a plate widi a quarter of a small chocolate cake on it in one hand and die ketchup bottle in the odier. He did not appear to notice his father. He climbed up on the stool and began to spread peanut butter on the cake. He had very large round ears that leaned away from his head and seemed to pull his eyes slightly too far apart. His shirt was green but so faded that the cowboy charging across the front of it was only a shadow. "Norton," Sheppard said, "I saw Rufus Johnson yesterday. Do you know what he was doing?" The child looked at him widi a kind of half attention, his eyes forward but not yet engaged. They were a paler blue dian his father's as if diey might have faded like die shirt; one of them listed, almost imperceptibly, toward the outer rim. "He was in an alley," Sheppard said, "and he had his hand in a garbage can. He was trying to get somediing to eat out of it." He paused to let this soak in. "He was hungry," he finished, and tried to pierce die child's conscience with his gaze.

The boy picked up the piece of chocolate cake and began to gnaw it from one corner.

"Norton," Sheppard said, "do you have any idea what it means to share?"

A flicker of attention. "Some of it's yours," Norton said

"Some of it's *his,"* Sheppard said heavily. It was hopeless. Almost any fault would have been preferable to selfishness—a violent temper, even a tendency to lie.

The child turned the bottle of ketchup upside down and began thumping ketchup onto the cake.

Sheppard's look of pain increased. "You are ten and Rufus Johnson is fourteen," he said. "Yet I'm sure your shirts would fit Rufus." Rufus Johnson was a boy he had been trying to help at the reformatory for *the* past year. He had been

released two months ago. "When he was in the reformatory, he looked pretty good, but when I saw him yesterday, he was skin and bones. He hasn't been eating cake with peanut butter on it for breakfast."

The child paused. "It's stale," he said. "That's why I have to put stuff on it."

Sheppard turned his face to the window at the end of the bar. The side lawn, green and even, sloped fifty feet or so down to a small suburban wood. When his wife was living, they had often eaten outside, even breakfast, on the grass. He had never noticed then that the child was selfish. "Listen to me," he said, turning back to him, "look at me and listen."

The boy looked at him. At least his eyes were forward.

"I gave Rufus a key to this house when he left the reformatory— to show my confidence in him and so he would have a place he could come to and feel welcome any time. He didn't use it, but I think he'll use it now because he's seen me and he's hungry. And if he doesn't use it, I'm going out and find him and bring him here. I can't see a child eating out of garbage cans."

The boy frowned. It was dawning upon him that something of his was threatened. Sheppard's mouth stretched in disgust. "Rufus's father died before

he was born," he said. "His mother is in the state penitentiary. He was raised by his grandfather in a shack without water or electricity and the old man beat him every day. How would you like to belong to a family like that ?"

"I don't know,," the child said lamely.

"Well, you might think about it sometime," Sheppard said.

Sheppard was City Recreational Director. On Saturdays he worked at the reformatory as a counselor, receiving nothing for it but the satisfaction of knowing he was helping boys no one else cared about. Johnson was the most intelligent boy he had worked with and the most deprived.

Norton turned what was left of the cake over as if he no longer wanted it.

"Maybe he won't come," the child said and his eyes brightened slightly.

"Think of everything you have that he doesn't!" Sheppard said. "Suppose you had to root in garbage cans for food ? Suppose you had a huge swollen foot and one side of you dropped lower than the other when you walked?"

The boy looked blank, obviously unable to imagine such a thing.

"You have a healthy body," Sheppard said, "a good home. You've never been taught anything but the truth. Your daddy gives you everything you need and want. You don't have a grandfather who beats you. And your mother is not in the state penitentiary."

The child pushed his plate away. Sheppard groaned aloud.

A knot of flesh appeared below the boy's suddenly distorted mouth. His face

became a mass of lumps with slits for eyes. "If she was in the penitentiary," he began in a kind of racking bellow, "I could go to seeeeee her." Tears rolled down his face and the ketchup dribbled on his chin. He looked as if he had been hit in the mouth. He abandoned himself and howled.

Sheppard sat helpless and miserable, like a man lashed by some elemental force of nature. This was not a normal grief. It was all part of his selfishness. She had been dead for over a year and a child's grief should not last so long. "You're going on eleven years old," he said reproachfully.

The child began an agonizing high-pitched heaving noise.

"If you stop thinking about yourself and think what you can do for somebody else," Sheppard said, "then you'll stop missing your mother."

The boy was silent but his shoulders continued to shake. Then his face collapsed and he began to howl again.

"Don't you think I'm lonely without her too?" Sheppard said. "Don't you think I miss her at all? I do, but I'm not sitting around moping. I'm busy helping odier people. When do you see me just sitting around thinking about my troubles?"

The boy slumped as if he were exhausted but fresh tears streaked his face. "What are you going to do today?" Sheppard asked, to get his mind on something else.

The child ran his arm across his eyes. "Sell seeds," he mumbled.

Always selling something. He had four quart jars full of nickels and dimes he had saved and he took them out of his closet every few days and counted them. "What are you selling seeds for?"

"To win a prize."

"What's the prize?"

"A thousand dollars."

"And what would you do if you had a thousand dollars?"

"Keep it," the child said and wiped his nose on his shoulder.

"I feel sure you would," Sheppard said. "Listen," he said and lowered his voice to an almost pleading tone, "suppose by some chance you did win a thousand dollars. Wouldn't you like to spend it on children less fortunate than yourself? Wouldn't you like to give some swings and trapezes to the orphanage? Wouldn't you like to buy poor Rufus Johnson a new shoe?"

The boy began to back away from the bar. Then suddenly he leaned forward and hung witii his mouth open over his plate. Sheppard groaned again. Every tiling came up, the cake, die peanut butter, the ketchup—a limp sweet batter. He hung over it gagging, more came, and he waited witli his moutli open over the plate as if he expected his heart to come up next.

"It's all right," Sheppard said, "it's all right. You couldn't help it.

Wipe your moudi and go lie down."

The child hung tiiere a moment longer. Then he raised his face and looked blindly at his father.

"Go on," Sheppard said. "Go on and lie down."

The boy pulled up the end of his t-shirt and smeared his moudi with it. Then he climbed down off the stool and wandered out of the kitchen.

Sheppard sat there staring at the puddle of half-digested food. The sour odor reached him and he drew back. His gorge rose. He got up and carried the plate to the sink and turned die water on it and watched grimly as the mess ran down die drain. Johnson's sad tiiin hand rooted in garbage cans for food while his own child, selfish, unresponsive, greedy, had so much tiiat he tlirew it up. He cut off tlie faucet with a tlirust of his fist. Johnson had a capacity for real response and had been deprived of everything from birth; Norton was average or below and had had every advantage.

He went back to tiie bar to finish his breakfast. The cereal was soggy in the cardboard box but he paid no attention to what he was eating. Johnson was worth any amount of effort because he had tiie potential. He had seen it from the time the boy had limped in for his first interview.

Sheppard's office at the reformatory was a narrow closet widi one window and a small table and two chairs in it. He had never been inside a confessional but he thought it must be tiie same kind of operation he had here, except that he explained, he did not absolve. His credentials were less dubious than a priest's; he had been trained for what he was doing.

When Johnson came in for his first interview, he had been reading over the boy's record—senseless destruction, windows smashed, city trash boxes set afire, tires slashed—die kind of tiling he found where boys had been transplanted abruptly from tlie county to tiie city as tiiis one had. He came to Johnson's I. Q. score. It was 140. He raised his eyes eagerly.

The boy sat slumped on tiie edge of his chair, his arms hanging between his thighs. The light from die window fell on his face. His eyes, steel-colored and very still, were trained narrowly forward. His thin dark hair hung in a flat forelock acoss tiie side of his forehead, not carelessly like a boy's, but fiercely like an old man's. A kind of fanatic intelligence was palpable in his face.

Sheppard smiled to diminish tiie distance between tiiem.

The boy's expression did not soften. He leaned back in his chair and lifted a monstrous club foot to his knee. The foot was in a heavy black battered shoe with a sole four or five inches thick. The leather parted from it in one place and the end of an empty sock protruded like a gray tongue from a severed head. The case was clear to Sheppard instantly. His mischief was

compensation for the foot.

"Well Rufus," he said, "I see by the record here that you don't have but a year to serve. What do you plan to do when you get out?"

"I don't make no plans," the boy said. His eyes shifted indifferendy to something outside die window behind Sheppard in die far distance.

"Maybe you ought to," Sheppard said and smiled.

Johnson continued to gaze beyond him.

"I want to see you make tlie most of your intelligence," Shep pard said. "What's most important to you? Let's talk about what's important to *you."* His eyes dropped involuntarily to the foot.

"Study it and git your fill," die boy drawled.

Sheppard reddened. The black deformed mass swelled before his eyes. He ignored die remark and die leer die boy was giving him. "Rufus," he said, "you've got into a lot of senseless trouble but I think when you understand why you do diese diings, you'll be less inclined to do diem." He smiled. They had so few friends, saw so few pleasant faces, diat half his effectiveness came from nodiing more dian smiling at them. "There are a lot of diings about yourself tliat I think I can explain to you," he said.

Johnson looked at him stonily. "I ain't asked for no explanation," he said. "I already know why I do what I do."

"Well good!" Sheppard said. "Suppose you tell me what's made you do die diings you've done?"

A black sheen appeared in the boy's eyes. "Satan," he said. "He has me in his power."

Sheppard looked at him steadily. There was no indication on die boy's face diat he had said this to be funny. The line of his thin moudi was set with pride. Sheppard's eyes hardened. He felt a momentary dull despair as if he were faced with some elemental warping of nature diat had happened too long ago to be corrected now. This boy's questions about life had been answered by signs nailed on die pine trees: DOES SATAN HAVE YOU IN HIS POWER? REPENT OR BURN IN HELL, JESUS SAVES. He would know die Bible with or without reading it. His despair gave way to outrage. "Rubbish!" he snorted. "We're living in die space age! You're too smart to give me an answer like diat."

Johnson's moudi twisted slightly. His look was contemptuous but amused. There was a glint of challenge in his eyes.

Sheppard scrutinized his face. Where there was intelligence anydiing was possible. He smiled again, a smile diat was like an invitation to the boy to come into a school room widi all its windows dirown open to die light. "Rufus," he

said, "I'm going to arrange for you to have a conference with me once a week. Maybe diere's an explanation for your explanation. Maybe I can explain your devil to you."

After that he had talked to Johnson every Saturday for the rest of die year. He talked at random, the kind of talk the boy would never have heard before. He talked a little above him to give him somediing to reach for. He roamed from simple psychology and die dodges of the human mind to astronomy and the space capsules diat were whirling around the earth faster than die speed of sound and would soon encircle die stars. Instinctively he concentrated on die stars. He wanted to give die boy something to reach for besides his neighbor's goods. He wanted to stretch his horizons. He wanted him to *sec* die universe, to see diat the darkest parts of it could be penetrated. He would have given anydiing to be able to put a telescope in Johnson's hands.

Johnson said little and what he did say, for the sake of his pride, was in dissent or senseless contradiction, widi die clubfoot raised always to his knee like a weapon ready for use, but Sheppard was not deceived. He watched his eyes and every week he saw somediing in diem crumble. From the boy's face, hard but shocked, braced against the light diat was ravaging him, he could see that he was hitting dead center.

Johnson was free now to live out of garbage cans and rediscover his old ignorance. The injustice of it was infuriating. He had been sent back to die grandfather; the old man's imbecility could only be imagined. Perhaps die boy had by now run away from him. The idea of getting custody of Johnson had occurred to Sheppard before, but die fact of the grandfather had stood in the way. Nothing excited him so much as thinking what he could do for such a boy. First he would have him fitted for a new orthopedic shoe. His back was thrown out of line every time he took a step. Then he would encourage him in some particular intellectual interest. He thought of the telescope. He could buy a second-hand one and they could set it up in the attic window. He sat for almost ten minutes thinking what he could do if he had Johnson here with him. What was wasted on Norton would cause Johnson to flourish. Yesterday when he had seen him with his hand in the garbage can, he had waved and started forward. Johnson had seen him, paused a spiltsecond, then vanished with die swiftness of a rat, but not before Sheppard had seen his expression change. Something had kindled in the boy's eyes, he was sure of it, some memory of the lost light.

He got up and threw the cereal box in the garbage. Before he left the house, he looked into Norton's room to be sure he was not still sick. The child was sitting cross-legged on his bed. He had emptied the quart jars of change into one large pile in front of him, and was sorting it out by nickels and dimes and quarters.

That afternoon Norton was alone in the house, squatting on the floor of his room arranging packages of flower seeds in rows around himself. Rain slashed against the window panes and rattled in the gutters. The room had grown dark but every few minutes it was lit by silent lightning and the seed packages showed up gaily on the floor. He squatted motionless like a large pale frog in the midst of this potential garden. All at once his eyes became alert. Without warning the rain had stopped. The silence was heavy as if the downpour had been hushed by violence. He remained motionless, only his eyes turning.

Into die silence came the distinct click of a key turning in the front door lock. The sound was a very deliberate one. It drew atten tion to itself and held it as if it were controlled more by a mind than by a hand. The child leapt up and got into the closet.

The footsteps began to move in the hall. They were deliberate and irregular, a light and then a heavy one, then a silence as if the visitor had paused to listen himself or to examine something. In a minute the kitchen door screeked. The footsteps crossed die kitchen to the refrigerator. The closet wall and the kitchen wall were **the** same. Norton stood with his ear pressed against it. The refrigerator door opened. There was a prolonged silence.

He took off his shoes and then tiptoed out of the closet and stepped over the seed packages. In the middle of the room, he stopped and remained where he was, rigid. A thin bony-face boy in a wet black suit stood in his door, blocking his escape. His hair was flattened to his skull by the rain. He stood there like an irate drenched crow. His look went through the child like a pin and paralyzed him. Then his eyes began to move over everything in the room—the unmade bed, the dirty curtains on the one large window, a photograph of a wide-faced young woman that stood up in the clutter on top of the dresser.

The child's tongue suddenly went wild. "He's been expecting you, he's going to give you a new shoe because you have to eat out of garbage cans!" he said in a kind of mouse-like shriek.

"I eat out of garbage cans," the boy said slowly with a beady stare, "because I like to eat out of garbage cans. See?"

The child nodded.

"And I got ways of getting my own shoe. See?"

The child nodded, mesmerized.

The boy limped in and sat down on the bed. He arranged a pillow behind him and stretched his short leg out so that the big black shoe rested conspicuously on a fold of the sheet. Norton's gaze settled on it and remained immobile. The sole was as thick as a brick. Johnson wiggled it slightly and smiled. "If I kick

somebody *once* with this," he said, "it learns them not to mess with me."

The child nodded.

"Go in the kitchen," Johnson said, "and make me a sandwich with some of that rye bread and ham and bring me a glass of milk."

Norton went off like a mechanical toy, pushed in the right direction. He made a large greasy sandwich with ham hanging out the sides of it and poured out a glass of milk. Then he returned to the room with the glass of milk in one hand and the sandwich in the other.

Johnson was leaning back regally against the pillow. "Thanks, waiter," he said and took the sandwich. Norton stood by the side of the bed, holding the glass.

The boy tore into the sandwich and ate steadily until he finished it. Then he took the glass of milk. He held it with both hands like a child and when he lowered it for breath, there was a rim of milk around his mouth. He handed Norton the empty glass. "Go get me one of them oranges in there, waiter," he said hoarsely.

Norton went to the kitchen and returned with the orange. Johnson peeled it with his fingers and let the peeling drop in die bed. He ate it slowly, spitting die seeds out in front of him. When he finished, he wiped his hands on the sheet and gave Norton a long appraising stare. He appeared to have been softened by the service. "You're his kid all right," he said. "You got die same stupid face."

The child stood there stolidly as if he had not heard. "He don't know his left hand from his right," Johnson said with a hoarse pleasure in his voice. The child cast his eyes a little to the side of the boy's face and looked fixedly at the wall. "Yaketty yaketty yak," Johnson said, "and never says a thing." The child's upper lip lifted slightly but he didn't say anything. "Gas," Johnson said. "Gas." The child's face began to have a wary look of belligerence. He backed away slightly as if he were prepared to retreat instantly. "He's good," he mumbled. "He helps people." "Good!" Johnson said savagely. He thrust his head forward. "Listen here," he hissed, "I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't *right!"*

Norton looked stunned. The screen door in the kitchen banged and someone entered.

Johnson sat forward instantly. "Is that him?" he said. "It's die cook," Norton said. "She comes in die afternoon." Johnson got up and limped into the hall and stood in the kitchen door and Norton followed him.

The colored girl was at the closet taking off a bright red raincoat. She was a tall light-yellow girl with a mouth like a large rose diat had darkened and wilted. Her hair was dressed in tiers on top of her head and leaned to the side like the Tower of Pisa.

Johnson made a noise through his teeth. "Well look at Aunt Jemima," he said.

The girl paused and trained an insolent gaze on them. They might have been dust on the floor.

"Come on," Johnson said, "let's see what all you got besides a nigger." He opened the first door to his right in the hall and looked into a pink-tiled bathroom. "A pink can!" he murmured.

He turned a comical face to the child. "Does he sit on that?"

"It's for company," Norton said, "but he sits on it sometimes."

"He ought to empty his head in it," Johnson said.

The door was open to the next room. It was the room Sheppard had slept in since his wife died. An ascetic-looking iron bed stood on the bare floor. A heap of Little League baseball uniforms was piled in one corner. Papers were scattered over a large roll-top desk and held down in various places by his pipes. Johnson stood looking into the room silently. He wrinkled his nose. "Guess who?" he said.

The door to the next room was closed but Johnson opened it and thrust his head into the semi-darkness within. The shades were down and the air was close with a faint scent of perfume in it. There was a wide antique bed and a mammoth dresser whose mirror glinted in the half light. Johnson snapped the light switch by the door and crossed the room to the mirror and peered into it. A silver comb and brush lay on the linen runner. He picked up the comb and began to run it through his hair. He combed it straight down on his forehead. Then he swept it to the side, Hitler fashion.

"Leave her comb alone!" the child said. He stood in the door, pale and breathing heavily as if he were watching sacrilege in a holy place.

Johnson put the comb down and picked up the brush and gave his hair a swipe with it.

"She's dead," the child said.

"I ain't afraid of dead people's things," Johnson said. He opened the top drawer and slid his hand in. "Take your big fat dirty hands off my mother's clothes!" the child said in a high suffocated voice.

"Keep your shirt on, sweedieart," Johnson murmured. He pulled up a wrinkled red polka dot blouse and dropped it back. Then he pulled out a green silk

kerchief and whirled it over his head and let it float to the floor. His hand continued to plow deep into the drawer. After a moment it came up gripping a faded corset widi four dangling metal supporters. "Thisyer must be her saddle," he observed.

He lifted it gingerly and shook it. Then he fastened it around his waist and jumped up and down, making the metal supporters dance. He began to snap his fingers and turn his hips from side to side. "Gonter rock, rattle and roll," he sang. "Gonter rock, rattle and roll. Can't please that woman, to save my doggone soul." He began to move around, stamping the good foot down and slinging the heavy one to the side. He danced out the door, past the stricken child and down the hall toward the kitchen.

A half hour later Sheppard came home. He dropped his raincoat on a chair in the hall and came as far as the parlor door and stopped. His face was suddenly transformed. It shone with pleasure. Johnson sat, a dark figure, in a high-backed pink upholstered chair. The wall behind him was lined with books from floor to ceiling. He was reading one. Sheppard's eyes narrowed. It was a volume of die Encyclopedia Britannica. He was so engrossed in it that he did not look up. Sheppard held his breath. This was the perfect setting for the boy. He had to keep him here. He had to manage it somehow.

"Rufusl" he said, "it's good to see you boy I" and he bounded forward with his arm oustretched.

Johnson looked up, his face blank. "Oh hello," he said. He ignored the hand as long as he was able but when Sheppard did not wididraw it, he grudgingly shook it.

Sheppard was prepared for diis kind of reaction. It was part of Johnson's make-up never to show enthusiasm. "How are things?" he said. "How's your grandfather treating you?" He sat down on the edge of the sofa.

"He dropped dead," die boy said indifferently.

"You don't mean it I" Sheppard cried. He got up and sat down on the coffee table nearer the boy. "Naw," Johnson said, "he ain't dropped dead. I wisht he had."

"Well where is he?" Sheppard muttered. "He's gone with a remnant to thejjills," Johnson said. "Him and

some others. They're going to bury some Bibles in a cave and take two of different kinds of animals and all like that. Like Noah.

Only this time it's going to be fire, not flood."

Sheppard's mouth stretched wryly. "I see," he said. Then he **said, "In other** words the old fool has abandoned you?"

"He ain't no fool," the boy said in an indignant tone.
"Has he abandoned you or not?" Sheppard asked impatiently. The boy shrugged.
"Where's your probation officer?" "I ain't supposed to keep up with him," Johnson said. "He's sup
posed to keep up with me."

Sheppard laughed. "Wait a minute," he said. He got up and went into the hall and got his raincoat off the chair and took it to the hall closet to hang it up. He had to give himself time to think, to decide how he could ask the boy so that he would stay. He couldn't force him to stay. It would have to be voluntary. Johnson pretended not to like him. That was only to uphold his pride, but he would have to ask him in such a way that his pride could still be upheld. He opened the closet door and took out a hanger. An old gray winter coat of his wife's still hung there. He pushed it aside but it didn't move. He pulled it open roughly and winced as if he had seen the larva inside a cocoon. Norton stood in it, his face swollen and pale, with a drugged look of misery on it. Sheppard stared at him. Suddenly he was confronted with a possibility. "Get out of there," he said. He caught him by the shoulder and propelled him firmly into the parlor and over to the pink chair where Johnson was sitting with the encyclopedia in his lap. He was going to risk everything in one blow.

"Rufus," he said, "I've got a problem. I need your help." Johnson looked up suspiciously. "Listen," Sheppard said, "we need another boy in the house." There was a genuine desperation in his voice. "Norton here has never had to divide anything in his life. He doesn't know what it means to share. And I need somebody to teach him. How about helping me out? Stay here for a while with us, Rufus. I need your help." The excitement in his voice made it thin.

The child suddenly came to life. His face swelled with fury. "He went in her room and used her comb!" he screamed, yanking Sheppard's arm. "He put on her corset and danced with Leola, he . . ."

"Stop this!" Sheppard said sharply. "Is tattling all you're capable of? I'm not asking you for a report on Rufus's conduct. I'm asking you to make him welcome here. Do you understand?

"You see how it is?" he asked, turning to Johnson. Norton kicked die leg of die pink chair viciously, just missing
Johnson's swollen foot. Sheppard yanked him back. "He said you weren't nothing but gas!" the child shrieked. A sly look of pleasure crossed Johnson's face. Sheppard was not put back. These insults were part of die boy's
defensive mechanism. "What about it, Rufus?" he said. "Will you stay with us

for a while?"

Johnson looked straight in front of him and said nothing. He smiled slightly and appeared to gaze upon some vision of the future that pleased him.

"I don't care," he said and turned a page of the encyclopedia. "I can stand anywhere." "Wonderful." Sheppard said. "Wonderful." "He said," the child said in a throaty whisper, "you didn't know your left hand from your right." Tnere was a silence. Johnson wet his finger and turned another page of the encyclo pedia.

"I have something to say to both of you," Sheppard said in a voice wiuSout inflection. His eyes moved from one to the other of them and he spoke slowly as if what he was saying he would say only once and it behooved them to listen. "If it made any difference to me what Rufus thinks of me," he said, "then I wouldn't be asking him here. Rufus is going to help me out and I'm going to help him out and we're both going to help you out. I'd simply be selfish if I let what Rufus thinks of me interfere with what I can do for Rufus. If I can help a person, all I want is to do it. I'm above and beyond simple pettiness."

Neither of them made a sound. Norton stared at the chair cushion. Johnson peered closer at some fine print in the encyclopedia. Sheppard was looking at the tops of their heads. He smiled. After all, he had won. The boy was staying. He reached out and ruffled Norton's hair and slapped Johnson on the shoulder. "Now you fellows sit here and get acquainted," he said gaily and started toward the door. "I'm going to see what Leola left us for supper."

When he was gone, Johnson raised his head and looked at Norton. The child looked back at him bleakly. "God, kid," Johnson said in a cracked voice, "how do you stand it?" His face was stiff with outrage. "He thinks he's Jesus Christ!"

11

Sheppard's attic was a large unfinished room with exposed beams and no electric light. They had set die telescope up on a tripod in one of die dormer windows. It pointed now toward the dark sky where a sliver of moon, as fragile as an egg shell, had just emerged from behind a cloud with a brilliant silver edge. Inside, a kerosene lantern set on a trunk cast their shadows upward and tangled diem, wavering slightly, in the joints overhead. Sheppard was sitting on a packing box, looking through die telescope, and Johnson was at his elbow, waiting to get at it. Sheppard had bought it for fifteen dollars two days before at a pawn shop.

"Quit hoggin it," Johnson said. Sheppard got up and Johnson slid onto the box and put his eye to die instrument.

Sheppard sat down on a straight chair a few feet away. His face was flushed with pleasure. This much of his dream was a reality. Widiin a week he had made it possible for diis boy's vision to pass dirough a slender channel to the stars. He looked at Johnson's bent back widi complete satisfaction. The boy had on one of Norton's plaid shirts and some new khaki trousers he had bought him. The shoe would be ready next week. He had taken him to die brace shop die day after he came and had him fitted for a new shoe. Johnson was as touchy about die foot as if it were a sacred object. His face had been glum while die clerk, a young man with a bright pink bald head, measured die foot with his profane hands. The shoe was going to make die greatest difference in the boy's attitude. Even a child with normal feet was in love with die world after he had got a new pair of shoes. When Norton got a new pair, he walked around for days with his eyes on his feet.

Sheppard glanced across the room at the child. He was sitting on the floor against a trunk, trussed up in a rope he had found and wound around his legs from his ankles to his knees. He appeared so far away that Sheppard might have been looking at him dirough the wrong end of the telescope. He had had to whip him only once since Johnson had been with them—the first night when Norton had realized that Johnson was going to sleep in his motier's bed. He did not believe in whipping children, particularly in anger. In this case, he had done both and widi good results. He had had no more trouble with Norton.

The child hadn't shown any positive generosity toward Johnson but what he couldn't help, he appeared to be resigned to. In die mornings Sheppard sent the two of them to die Y swimming pool, gave them money to get dieir lunch at the cafeteria and instructed them to meet him in die park in die afternoon to watch his Little League baseball practice. Every afternoon they had arrived at die park, shambling, silent, their faces closed each on his own thoughts as if neither were aware of die odier's existence. At least he could be thankful there were no fights.

Norton showed no interest in the telescope. "Don't you want to get up and look dirough the telescope, Norton?" he said. It irritated him that the child showed no intellectual curiosity whatsoever. "Rufus is going to be way ahead of you."

Norton leaned forward absently and looked at Johnson's back.

Johnson turned around from die instrument. His face had begun to fill out again. The look of outrage had retreated from his hollow cheeks and was shored up now in die caves of his eyes, like a fugitive from Sheppard's kindness. "Don't waste your valuable time, kid," he said. "You seen die moon once, you seen it."

Sheppard was amused by these sudden turns of perversity. The boy resisted whatever he suspected was meant for his improvement and contrived when he

was vitally interested in something to leave die impression he was bored. Sheppard was not deceived. Secretly Johnson was learning what he wanted him to learn—diat his benefactor was impervious to insult and that diere were no cracks in his armor of kindness and patience where a successful shaft could be driven. "Some day you may go to the moon," he said. "In ten years men will probably be making round trips there on schedule. Why you boys may be spacemen. Astronauts!"

"Astro-nuts," Johnson said.

"Nuts or nauts," Sheppard said, "it's perfectly possible that you, Rufus Johnson, will go to the moon."

Something in the depths of Johnson's eyes stirred. All day his humor had been glum. "I ain't going to the moon and get there alive," he said, "and when I die I'm going to hell."

"It's at least possible to get to the moon," Sheppard said dryly. The best way to handle this kind of thing was with gentle ridicule. "We can see it. We know it's there. Nobody has given any reliable evidence there's a hell."

"The Bible has give the evidence," Johnson said darkly, "and if you die and go there you burn forever."

The child leaned forward.

"Whoever says it ain't a hell," Johnson said, "is contradicting Jesus. The dead are judged and the wicked are damned. They weep and gnash their teeth while they burn," he continued, "and it's everlasting darkness."

The child's mouth opened. His eyes appeared to grow hollow.

"Satan runs it," Johnson said.

Norton lurched up and took a hobbled step toward Sheppard. "Is she there?" he said in a loud voice. "Is she there burning up?" He kicked the rope off his feet. "Is she on fire?"

"Oh my God," Sheppard muttered. "No no," he said, "of course she isn't. Rufus is mistaken. Your mother isn't anywhere. She's not unhappy. She just isn't." His lot would have been easier if when his wife died he had told Norton she had gone to heaven and that some day he would see her again, but he could not allow himself to bring him up on a lie.

Norton's face began to twist. A knot formed in his chin.

"Listen," Sheppard said quickly and pulled the child to him, "your mother's spirit lives on in other people and it'll live on in you if you're good and generous like she was."

The child's pale eyes hardened in disbelief.

Sheppard's pity turned to revulsion. The boy would rather she be in hell than nowhere. "Do you understand?" he said. "She doesn't exist." He put his hand on

the child's shoulder. "That's all I have to give you," he said in a softer, exasperated tone, "the truth."

Instead of howling, the boy wrenched himself away and caught Johnson by the sleeve. "Is she there, Rufus?" he said "Is she there, burning up?"

Johnson's eyes glittered. "Well," he said, "she is if she was evil. Was she a whore?"

"Your mother was not a whore," Sheppard said sharply. He had the sensation of driving a car without brakes. "Now let's have no more of this foolishness. We were talking about the moon."

"Did she believe in Jesus?" Johnson asked. Norton looked blank. After a second he said, "Yes," as if he
saw that this was necessary. "She did," he said. "All the time." "She did not," Sheppard muttered. "She did all the time," Norton said. "I heard her say she did all
the time." "She's saved," Johnson said. The child still looked puzzled. "Where?" he said. "Where is
she at?" "On high," Johnson said. "Where's that?" Norton gasped. "It's in the sky somewhere," Johnson said, "but you got to be
dead to get there. You can't go in no space ship." There was a narrow gleam in his eyes now like a beam holding steady on its target.

"Man's going to the moon," Sheppard said grimly, "is very much like the first fish crawling out of the water onto land billions and billions of years ago. He didn't have an earth suit. He had to grow his adjustments inside. He developed lungs."

"When I'm dead will I go to hell or where she is?" Norton asked. "Right now you'd go where she is," Johnson said, "but if you live long enough, you'll go to hell." Sheppard rose abruptly and picked up the lantern. "Close the window, Rufus," he said. "It's time we went to bed."

On the way down the attic stairs he heard Johnson say in a loud whisper behind him, "I'll tell you all about it tomorrow, kid, when Himself has cleared out."

The next day when the boys came to the ball park, he watched them as they came from behind the bleachers and around the edge of the field. Johnson's hand was on Norton's shoulder, his head bent toward die younger boy's ear, and on the child's face there was a look of complete confidence, of dawning light. Sheppard's grimace hardened. This would be Johnson's way of trying to annoy him. But he would not be annoyed. Norton was not bright enough to be damaged much. He gazed at the child's dull absorbed little face. Why try to make him

superior? Heaven and hell were for the mediocre, and he was that if he was anything.

The two boys came into the bleachers and sat down about ten feet away, facing him, but neither gave him any sign of recognition. He cast a glance behind him where the Little Leaguers were spread out in the field. Then he started for the bleachers. The hiss of Johnson's voice stopped as he approached.

"What have you fellows been doing today?" he asked genially.

"He's been telling me . . ." Norton started.

Johnson pushed the child in the ribs with his elbow. "We ain't been doing nothing," he said. His face appeared to be covered with a blank glaze but through it a look of complicity was blazoned forth insolently.

Sheppard felt his face grow warm, but he said nothing. A child in a Little League uniform had followed him and was nudging him in the back of the leg with a bat. He turned and put his arm around the boy's neck and went with him back to the game.

That night when he went to the attic to join the boys at the telescope, he found Norton there alone. He was sitting on the packing box, hunched over, looking intently through the instrument. Johnson was not there.

"Where's Rufus?" Sheppard asked.

"I said where's Rufus?" he said louder.

"Gone somewhere," the child said widiout turning around.

"Gone where?" Sheppard asked.

"He just said he was going somewhere. He said he was fed up looking at stars."

"I see," Sheppard said glumly. He turned and went back down the stairs. He searched the house without finding Johnson. Then he went to the living room and sat down. Yesterday he had been convinced of his success with the boy. Today he faced the possibility that he was failing with him. He had been over-lenient, too concerned to have Johnson like him. He felt a twinge of guilt. What difference did it make if Johnson liked him or not? What was tliat to him? When die boy came in, they would have a few things understood. As long as you stay here there'll be no going out at night by yourself, do you understand?

I don't have to stay here. It ain't nothing to me staying here.

Oh my God, he tliought. He could not bring it to that. He would have to be firm but not make an issue of it. He picked up the evening paper. Kindness and patience were always called for but he had not been firm enough. He sat holding the paper but not reading it. The boy would not respect him unless he showed firmness. The doorbell rang and he went to answer it. He opened it and stepped back, with a pained disappointed face.

A large dour policeman stood on the stoop, holding Johnson by the elbow. At die curb a patrol car waited. Johnson looked very white. His jaw was thrust forward as if to keep from trembling.

"We brought him here first because he raised such a fit," the policeman said, "but now that you've seen him, we're going to take him to the station and ask him a few questions."

"What happened?" Sheppard muttered.

"A house around the corner from here," die policeman said. "A real smash job, dishes broken all over die floor, furniture turned upside down . . ."

"I didn't have a tiling to do widi it!" Johnson said. "I was walking along minding my own bidnis when this cop came up and grabbed me."

Sheppard looked at the boy grimly. He made no effort to soften his expression.

Johnson flushed. "I was just walking along," he muttered, but with no conviction in his voice.

"Come on, bud," the policeman said.

"You ain't going to let him take me, are you?" Johnson said. "You believe me, don't you?" There was an appeal in his voice that Sheppard had not heard there before.

This was crucial. The boy would have to learn that he could not be protected when he was guilty. "You'll have to go with him, Rufus," he said.

"You're going to let him take me and I tell you I ain't done a thing?" Johnson said shrilly.

Sheppard's face became harder as his sense of injury grew. The boy had failed him even before he had had a chance to give him the shoe. They were to have got it tomorrow. All his regret turned suddenly on die shoe; his irritation at die sight of Johnson doubled.

"You made out like you had all this confidence in me," the boy mumbled.

"I did have," Sheppard said. His face was wooden.

Johnson turned away with the policeman but before he moved, a gleam of pure hatred flashed toward Sheppard from die pits of his eyes.

Sheppard stood in the door and watched them get into the patrol car and drive away. He summoned his compassion. He would go to die station tomorrow and see what he could do about getting him out of trouble. The night in jail would not hurt him and die experience would teach him that he could not treat with impunity someone who had shown him nothing but kindness. Then they would go get the shoe and perhaps after a night in jail it would mean even more to the boy.

The next morning at eight o'clock the police sergeant called and told him he could come pick Johnson up. "We booked a nigger on tliat charge," he said. "Your boy didn't have nodiing to do witii it."

Sheppard was at die station in ten minutes, his face hot witii shame. Johnson sat slouched on a bench in a drab outer office, reading a police magazine. There was no one else in die room. Sheppard sat down beside him and put his hand tentatively on his shoulder.

The boy glanced up—his lip curled—and back to the magazine.

Sheppard felt physically sick. The ugliness of what he had done bore in upon him with a sudden dull intensity. He had failed him at just the point where he might have turned him once and for all in the right direction. "Rufus," he said, "I apologize. I was wrong and you were right. I misjudged you."

The boy continued to read.

"I'm sorry."

The boy wet his finger and turned a page.

Sheppard braced himself. "I was a fool, Rufus," he said.

Johnson's mouth slid slightly to die side. He shrugged widiout raising his head from the magazine. "Will you forget it, diis time?" Sheppard said. "It won't happen again."

The boy looked up. His eyes were bright and unfriendly. "I'll forget it," he said, "but you better remember it." He got up and stalked toward the door. In the middle of die room he turned and jerked his arm at Sheppard and Sheppard jumped up and followed him as if the boy had yanked an invisible leash.

"Your shoe," he said eagerly, "today is the day to get your shoe!" Thank God for the shoe!

But when they went to the brace shop, they found diat the shoe had been made two sizes too small and a new one would not be ready for another ten days. Johnson's temper improved at once. The clerk had obviously made a mistake in the measurements but the boy insisted the foot had grown. He left die shop widi a pleased expression, as if, in expanding, the foot had acted on some inspiration of its own. Sheppard's face was haggard.

After this he redoubled his efforts. Since Johnson had lost in terest in die telescope, he bought a microscope and a box of prepared slides. If he couldn't impress the boy with immensity, he would try the infinitesimal. For two nights Johnson appeared absorbed in the new instrument, then he abruptly lost interest in it, but he seemed content to sit in die living room in the evening and read the encyclopedia. He devoured the encyclopedia as he devoured

his dinner, steadily and without dint to his appetite. Each subject appeared to enter his head, be ravaged, and thrown out. Nodiing pleased Sheppard more than to see the boy slouched on die sofa, his mouth shut, reading. After they had spent two or three evenings like this, he began to recover his vision. His confidence returned. He knew that some day he would be proud of Johnson.

On Thursday night Sheppard attended a city council meeting. He dropped the boys off at a movie on his way and picked them up on his way back. When they reached home, an automobile with a single red eye above its windshield was waiting in front of the house. Sheppard's lights as he turned into the driveway illuminated two dour faces in the car.

"The cops!" Johnson said. "Some nigger has broke in somewhere and they've come for me again."

"We'll see about that," Sheppard muttered. He stopped the car in the driveway and switched off the lights. "You boys go in the house and go to bed," he said. "I'll handle this."

He got out and strode toward the squad car. He thrust his head in the window. The two policemen were looking at him with silent knowledgeable faces. "A house on the corner of Shelton and Mills," the one in the driver's seat said. "It looks like a train run through it."

"He was in the picture show downtown," Sheppard said. "My boy was with him. He had nothing to do with the other one and he had nothing to do with this one. I'll be responsible."

"If I was you," the one nearest him said, "I wouldn't be responsible for any little bastard like him." "I said I'd be responsible," Sheppard repeated coldly. "You people made a mistake the last time. Don't make another." The policemen looked at each other. "It ain't our funeral," the one in the driver's seat said, and turned the key in the ignition.

Sheppard went in the house and sat down in the living room in the dark. He did not suspect Johnson and he did not want the boy to think he did. If Johnson thought he suspected him again, he would lose everything. But he wanted to know if his alibi was air-right. He thought of going to Norton's room and asking him if Johnson had left the movie. But that would be worse. Johnson would know what he was doing and would be incensed. He decided to ask Johnson himself. He would be direct. He went over in his mind what he was going to say and then he got up and went to the boy's door.

It was open as if he had been expected but Johnson was in bed. Just enough light came in from die hall for Sheppard to see his shape under the

sheet. He came in and stood at die foot of die bed. "They've gone," he said. "I told them you had nodiing to do with it and that I'd be responsible."

There was a muttered "Yeah," from the pillow. Sheppard hesitated. "Rufus," he said, "you didn't leave the movie for anydiing at all, did you?"

"You make out like you got all this confidence in me!" a sudden outraged voice cried, "and you ain't got any I You don't trust me no more now than you did then!" The voice, disembodied, seemed to come more surely from the depths of Johnson than when his face was visible. It was a cry of reproach, edged slightly widi contempt.

"I do have confidence in you," Sheppard said intensely. "I have every confidence in you. I believe in you and I trust you completely."

"You got your eye on me all the time," die voice said sullenly. "When you get through asking me a bunch of questions, you're going across the hall and ask Norton a bunch of diem."

"I have no intention of asking Norton anything and never did," Sheppard said gently. "And I don't suspect you at all. You could hardly have got from die picture show downtown and out here to break in a house and back to the picture show in the time you had."

"That's why you believe me!" the boy cried, "—because you think I couldn't have done it."

"No, no!" Sheppard said. "I believe you because I believe you've got the brains and the guts not to get in trouble again. I believe you know yourself well enough now to know diat you don't have to do such things. I believe that you can make anydiing of yourself that you set your mind to."

Johnson sat up. A faint light shone on his forehead but die rest of his face was invisible. "And I could have broke in there if I'd wanted to in the time I had," he said.

"But I know you didn't," Sheppard said. "There's not the least trace of doubt in my mind."

There was a silence. Johnson lay back down. Then die voice, low and hoarse, as if it were being forced out widi difficulty, said, "You don't want to steal and smash up diings when you've got everything you want already."

Sheppard caught his breath. The boy was tiianking him! He was thanking him! There was gratitude in his voice. There was appreciation. He stood there, smiling foolishly in the dark, trying to hold tiie moment in suspension. Involuntarily he took a step toward the pillow and stretched out his hand and touched Johnson's forehead. It was cold and dry like rusty iron.

"I understand. Good night, son," he said and turned quickly and left the room.

He closed the door behind him and stood there, overcome witii emotion.

Across the hall Norton's door was open. The child lay on the bed on his side, looking into the light from die hall.

After this, the road with Johnson would be smooth.

Norton sat up and beckoned to him.

He saw the child but after tiie first instant, he did not let his eyes focus directly on him. He could not go in and talk to Norton without breaking Johnson's trust. He hesitated, but remained where he was a moment as if he saw nothing. Tomorrow was the day they were to go back for the shoe. It would be a climax to the good feeling between them. He turned quickly and went back into his own room.

The child sat for some time looking at the spot where his father had stood. Finally his gaze became aimless and he lay back down.

The next day Johnson was glum and silent as if he were ashamed that he had revealed himself. His eyes had a hooded look. He seemed to have retired within himself and there to be going through some crisis of determination. Sheppard could not get to the brace shop quickly enough. He left Norton at home because he did not want his attention divided. He wanted to be free to observe Johnson's reaction minutely. The boy did not seem pleased or even interested in tiie prospect of the shoe, but when it became an actuality, certainly then he would be moved.

The brace shop was a small concrete warehouse lined and stacked widi the equipment of affliction. Wheel chairs and walkers covered most of die floor. The walls were hung witii every kind of crutch and brace. Artificial limbs were stacked on tiie shelves, legs and arms and hands, claws and hooks, straps and human harnesses and unidentifiable instruments for unnamed deformities. In a small clearing in die middle of the room there was a row of yellow plastic-cushioned chairs and a shoe-fitting stool. Johnson slouched down in one of the chairs and set his foot up on die stool and sat widi his eyes on it moodily. What was roughly the toe had broken open again and he had patched it with a piece of canvas; another place he had patched with what appeared to be the tongue of the original shoe. The two sides were laced with twine.

There was an excited flush on Sheppard's face; his heart was beating unnaturally fast.

The clerk appeared from the back of the shop with the new shoe under his arm. "Got her right this time!" he said. He straddled the shoe-fitting stool and held the shoe up, smiling as if he had produced it by magic.

It was a black slick shapeless object, shining hideously. It looked like a blunt weapon, highly polished.

Johnson gazed at it darkly.

"Widi this shoe," the clerk said, "you won't know you're walking. You'll think you're riding!" He bent his bright pink bald head and began gingerly to unlace the twine. He removed the old shoe as if he were skinning an animal still half alive. His expression was strained. The unsheathed mass of foot in the dirty sock made Sheppard feel queasy. He turned his eyes away until the new shoe was on. The clerk laced it up rapidly. "Now stand up and walk around," he said, "and see if that ain't power glide." He winked at Sheppard. "In that shoe," he said, "he won't know he don't have a normal foot."

Sheppard's face was bright with pleasure.

Johnson stood up and walked a few yards away. He walked stiffly with almost no dip in his short side. He stood for a moment, rigid, with his back to diem.

"Wonderful!" Sheppard said. "Wonderful." It was as if he had given the boy a new spine.

Johnson turned around. His mouth was set in a thin icy line. He came back to the seat and removed the shoe. He put his foot in the old one and began lacing it up.

"You want to take it home and see if it suits you first?" the clerk murmured.

"No," Johnson said. "I ain't going to wear it at all."

"What's wrong with it?" Sheppard said, his voice rising.

"I don't need no new shoe," Johnson said. "And when I do, I got ways of getting my own." His face was stony but there was a glint of triumph in his eyes.

"Boy," die clerk said, "is your trouble in your foot or in your head?"

"Go soak your skull," Johnson said. "Your brains are on fire."

The clerk rose glumly but with dignity and asked Sheppard what he wanted done with the shoe, which he dangled dispiritedly by die lace. Sheppard's face was a dark angry red. He was staring straight in front of him at a leather corset with an artificial arm attached.

The clerk asked him again.

"Wrap it up," Sheppard muttered. He turned his eyes to Johnson. "He's not mature enough for it yet," he said. "I had diought he was less of a child." The boy leered. "You been wrong before," he said.

That night diey sat in the living room and read as usual. Sheppard kept himself glumly entrenched behind die Sunday New York *Times*. He wanted to recover his good humor, but every time he diought of the rejected shoe, he felt a new charge of irritation. He did not trust himself even to look at Johnson. He realized that the boy had refused the shoe because he was insecure. Johnson had

been frightened by his own gratitude. He didn't know what to make of the new self he was becoming conscious of. He understood diat something he had been was threatened and he was facing himself and his possibilities for the first time. He was questioning his identity. Grudgingly, Sheppard felt a slight return of sympadiy for die boy. In a few minutes, he lowered his paper and looked at him.

Johnson was sitting on the sofa, gazing over the top of the encyclopedia. His expression was trancelike. He might have been listening to somediing far away. Sheppard watched him intently but die boy continued to listen, and did not turn his head. The poor kid is lost, Sheppard diought. Here he had sat all evening, sullenly reading die paper, and had not said a word to break die tension. "Rufus," he said.

Johnson continued to sit, stock-still, listening.

"Rufus," Sheppard said in a slow hypnotic voice, "you can be anydiing in die world you want to be. You can be a scientist or an architect or an engineer or whatever you set your mind to, and whatever you set your mind to be, you can be the best of its kind." He imagined his voice penetrating to the boy in die black caverns of his psyche. Johnson leaned forward but his eyes did not turn. On die street a car door closed. There was a silence. Then a sudden blast from the door bell.

Sheppard jumped up and went to die door and opened it. The same policeman who had come before stood there. The patrol car waited at die curb.

"Lemme see diat boy," he said. Sheppard scowled and stood aside. "He's been here all evening," he said. "I can vouch for it."

The policeman walked into the living room. Johnson appeared engrossed in his book. After a second he looked up widi an annoyed expression, like a great man interrupted at his work.

"What was that you were looking at in diat kitchen window over on Winter Avenue about a half hour ago, bud?" die policeman asked.

"Stop persecuting this boy!" Sheppard said. "I'll vouch for the fact he was here. I was here with him."

"You heard him," Johnson said. "I been here all the time."

"It ain't everybody makes tracks like you," the policeman said and eyed the clubfoot.

"They couldn't be his tracks," Sheppard growled, infuriated. "He's been here all the time. You're wasting your own time and you're wasting ours." His felt the *ours* seal his solidarity with die boy. "I'm sick of diis," he said. "You people are too damn lazy to go out and find whoever is doing diese diings. You come her$ automatically."

The policeman ignored this and continued looking through Johnson. His eyes were small and alert in his fleshy face. Finally he turned toward the door. "We'll get him sooner or later," he said, "with his head in a window and his tail out."

Sheppard followed him to the door and slammed it behind him.

His spirits were soaring. This was exactly what he had needed. He returned with an expectant face.

Johnson had put the book down and was sitting there, looking at him slyly. "Thanks," he said. Sheppard stopped. The boy's expression was predatory. He was openly leering.

"You ain't such a bad liar yourself," he said.

"Liar?" Sheppard murmured. Could the boy have left and come back? He felt himself sicken. Then a rush of anger sent him forward. "Did you leave?" he said furiously. "I didn't see you leave."

The boy only smiled.

"You went up in the attic to see Norton," Sheppard said.

"Naw," Johnson said, "that kid is crazy. He don't want to do notiiing but look through diat stinking telescope." "I don't want to hear about Norton," Sheppard said harshly. "Where were you?" "I was sitting on that pink can by my ownself," Johnson said. "There wasn't no witnesses." Sheppard took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He managed to smile.

Johnson rolled his eyes. "You don't believe in me," he said. His voice was cracked tiie way it had been in the dark room two nights before. "You make out like you got all this confidence in me but you ain't got any. When things get hot, you'll fade like the rest of them." The crack became exaggerated, comic. The mockery in it was blatant. "You don't believe in me. You ain't got no confidence," he wailed. "And you ain't any smarter than that cop. All that about tracks—that was a trap. There wasn't any tracks. That whole place is concreted in the back and my feet were dry."

Sheppard slowly put the handkerchief back in his pocket. He dropped down on the sofa and gazed at the rug beneath his feet. The boy's clubfoot was set within the circle of his vision. The pieced-together shoe appeared to grin at him with Johnson's own face. He caught hold of tiie edge of die sofa cushion and his knuckles turned white. A chill of hatred shook him. He hated the shoe, hated die foot, hated the boy. His face paled. Hatred choked him. He was aghast at himself.

He caught tiie boy's shoulder and gripped it fiercely as if to keep himself from falling. "Listen," he said, "you looked in that window to embarrass me. That was all you wanted—to shake my resolve to help you, but my resolve isn't shaken.

I'm stronger than you are. I'm stronger than you are and I'm going to save you. The good will triumph."

"Not when it ain't true," the boy said. "Not when it ain't right." "My resolve isn't shaken," Sheppard repeated. "I'm going to save you."

Johnson's look became sly again. "You ain't going to save me," he said. "You're going to tell me to leave this house. I did those other two jobs too—the first one as well as the one I done when I was supposed to be in the picture show."

"I'm not going to tell you to leave," Sheppard said. His voice was toneless, mechanical. "I'm going to save you." Johnson thrust his head forward. "Save yourself," he hissed. "Nobody can save me but Jesus."

Sheppard laughed curtly. "You don't deceive me," he said. "I flushed that out of your head in the reformatory. I saved you from that, at least."

The muscles in Johnson's face stiffened. A look of such repulsion hardened on his face that Sheppard drew back. The boy's eyes were like distorting mirrors in which he saw himself made hideous and grotesque. "I'll show you," Johnson whispered. He rose abruptly and started headlong for the door as if he could not get out of Sheppard's sight quick enough, but it was the door to the back hall he went through, not the front door. Sheppard turned on the sofa and looked behind him where the. boy had disappeared. He heard the door to his room slam. He was not leaving. The intensity had gone out of Sheppard's eyes. They looked flat and lifeless as if the shock of the boy's revelation were only now reaching the center of his consciousness. "If he would only leave," he murmured. "If he would only leave now of his own accord."

The next morning Johnson appeared at the breakfast table in the grandfather's suit he had come in. Sheppard pretended not to notice but one look told him what he already knew, that he was trapped, that there could be nothing now but a battle of nerves and that Johnson would win it. He wished he had never laid eyes *on* the boy. The failure of his compassion numbed him. He got out of the house as soon as he could and all day he dreaded to go home in the evening. He had a faint hope that the boy might be gone when he returned. The grandfather's suit might have meant he was leaving. The hope grew in the afternoon. When he came home and opened the front door, his heart was pounding.

He stopped in the hall and looked silently into the living room. His expectant expression faded. His face seemed suddenly as old as his white hair. The two boys were sitting close together on the sofa, reading the same book. Norton's cheek rested against the sleeve of Johnson's black suit. Johnson's finger moved

under the lines they were reading. The elder brother and the younger. Sheppard looked woodenly at this scene for almost a minute. Then he walked into the room and took off his coat and dropped it on a chair. Neither boy noticed him. He went on to the kitchen.

Leola left the supper on the stove every afternoon before she left and he put it on the table. His head ached and his nerves were taut. He sat down on the kitchen stool and remained there, sunk in his depression. He wondered if he could infuriate Johnson enough to make him leave of his own accord. Last night what had enraged him was the Jesus business. It might enrage Johnson, but it depressed him. Why not simply tell the boy to go? Admit defeat. The thought of facing Johnson again sickened him. The boy looked at him as if he were the guilty one, as if he were a moral leper. He knew without conceit that he was a good man, that he had nothing to reproach himself with. His feelings about Johnson now were involuntary. He would like to feel compassion for him. He would like to be able to help him. He longed for the time when there would be no one but himself and Norton in the house, when the child's simple selfishness would be all he had to contend with, and his own loneliness.

He got up and took three serving dishes off the shelf and took them to the stove. Absently he began pouring the butterbeans and the hash into the dishes. When the food was on the table, he called them in.

They brought the book with them. Norton pushed his place setting around to the same side of the table as Johnson's and moved his chair next to Johnson's chair. They sat down and put the book

between them. It was a black book with red edges. "What's that you're reading?" Sheppard asked, sitting down. "The Holy Bible," Johnson said. God give me strength, Sheppard said under his breath. "We lifted it from a ten cent store," Johnson said. "We?" Sheppard muttered. He turned and glared at Norton.

The child's face was bright and there was an excited sheen to his eyes. The change that had come over the boy struck him for the first time. He looked alert. He had on a blue plaid shirt and his eyes were a brighter blue than he had ever seen them before. There was a strange new life in him, the sign of new and more rugged vices. "So now you steal?" he said, glowering. "You haven't learned to be generous but you have learned to steal."

"No he ain't," Johnson said. "I was the one lifted it. He only watched. He can't sully himself. It don't make any difference about me. I'm going to hell anyway."

Sheppard held his tongue. "Unless," Johnson said, "I repent." "Repent, Rufus," Norton said in a pleading voice. "Repent,

hear? You don't want to go to hell." "Stop talking this nonsense," Sheppard said,

looking sharply at the child. "If I do repent, I'll be a preacher," Johnson said. "If you're going to do it, it's no sense in doing it halfway." "What are you going to be, Norton,".Sheppard asked in a britde voice, "a preacher too?" There was a glitter of wild pleasure in the child's eyes. "A space

manl" he shouted. "Wonderful," Sheppard said bitterly. "Those space ships ain't going to do you any good unless you believe in Jesus," Johnson said. He wet his finger and began to leaf through the pages of the Bible. "I'll read you where it says so," he said.

Sheppard leaned forward and said in a low furious voice, "Put that Bible up, Rufus, and eat your dinner." Johnson continued searching for the passage. "Put diat Bible up!" Sheppard shouted.

The boy stopped and looked up. His expression was startled but pleased.

"That book is something for you to hide behind," Sheppard said. "It's for cowards, people who are afraid to stand on their own feet and figure things out for themselves."

Johnson's eyes snapped. He backed his chair a little way from the table. "Satan has you in his power," he said. "Not only me. You too."

Sheppard reached across the table to grab the book but Johnson snatched it and put it in his lap. Sheppard laughed. "You don't believe in that book and you know you don't believe in it!" "I believe it I" Johnson said. "You don't know what I believe and what I don't." Sheppard shook his head. "You don't believe it. You're to intelligent." "I ain't too intelligent," the boy muttered. "You don't know nothing about me. Even if I didn't believe it, it would still be true."

"You don't believe it 1" Sheppard said. His face was a taunt.

"I believe it!" Johnson said breathlessly. "I'll show you I believe it!" He opened die book in his lap and tore out a page of it and thrust it into his mouth. He fixed his eyes on Sheppard. His jaws worked furiously and the paper crackled as he chewed it.

"Stop this," Sheppard said in a dry, burnt-out voice. "Stop it." The boy raised the Bible and tore out a page with his teeth and began grinding it in his mouth, his eyes burning. Sheppard reached across die table and knocked the book out of his hand. "Leave the table," he said coldly.

Johnson swallowed what was in his moudi. His eyes widened as if a vision of splendor were opening up before him. "I've eaten it!" he breathed. "I've eaten it like Ezekiel and it was honey to my moudi!"

"Leave diis table," Sheppard said. His hands were clenched beside his plate.

"I've eaten it!" the boy cried. Wonder transformed his face. "I've eaten it like

Ezekiel and I don't want none of your food after it nor no more ever."

"Go then," Sheppard said softly. "Go. Go."

The boy rose and picked up the Bible and started toward the hall with it. At the door he paused, a small black figure on the direshold o£ some dark apocalypse. "The devil has you in his power," he said in a jubilant voice and disappeared.

After supper Sheppard sat in the living room alone. Johnson had left the house but he could not believe that the boy had simply gone. The first feeling of release had passed. He felt dull and cold as at the onset of an illness and dread had settled in him like a fog. Just to leave would be too anticlimactic an end for Johnson's taste; he would return and try to prove somediing. He might come back a week later and set fire to the place. Nodiing seemed too outrageous now.

He picked up the paper and tried to read. In a moment he threw it down and got up and went into the hall and listened. He might be hiding in the attic. He went to the attic door and opened it.

The lantern was lit, casting a dim light on the stairs. He didn't hear anything. "Norton," he called, "are you up there ?" There was no answer. He mounted the narrow stairs to see.

Amid the strange vine-like shadows cast by die lantern, Norton sat widi his eye to the telescope. "Norton," Sheppard said, "do you know where Rufus went?"

The child's back was to him. He was sitting hunched, intent, his large ears directly above his shoulders. Suddenly he waved his hand and crouched closer to die telescope as if he could not get near enough to what he saw.

"Norton!" Sheppard said in a loud voice.

The child didn't move.

"Norton!" Sheppard shouted.

Norton started. He turned around. There was an unnatural brightness about his eyes. After a moment he seemed to see that it was Sheppard. "I've found her!" he said breathlessly.

"Found who?" Sheppard said.

"Mamma!"

Sheppard steadied himself in the door way. The jungle of shadows around die child thickened. "Come and look!" he cried. He wiped his sweaty face on die tail of his plaid shirt and then put his eye back to the telescope. His back became fixed in a rigid intensity. All at once he waved again.

"Norton," Sheppard said, "you don't see anything in the telescope but star clusters. Now you've had enough of that for one night. You'd better go to bed.

Do you know where Rufus is?"

"She's there!" he cried, not turning around from die telescope. "She waved at me I" "I want you in bed in fifteen minutes," Sheppard said. After a moment he said, "Do you hear me, Norton?"

The child began to wave frantically.

"I mean what I say," Sheppard said. "I'm going to call in fifteen minutes and see if you're in bed."

He went down die steps again and returned to the parlor. He went to die front door and cast a cursory glance out. The sky was crowded witJi the stars he had been fool enough to think Johnson could reach. Somewhere in die small wood behind the house, a bull frog sounded a low hollow note. He went back to his chair and sat a few minutes. He decided to go to bed. He put his hands on the arms of die chair and leaned forward and heard, like die first shrill note of a disaster warning, the siren of a police car, moving slowly into die neighborhood and nearer until it subsided with a moan outside die house.

He felt a cold weight on his shoulders as if an icy cloak had been dirown about him. He went to the door and opened it.

Two policemen were coming up the walk with a dark snarling Johnson between diem, handcuffed to each. A reporter jogged alongside and another policeman waited in the patrol car.

"Here's your boy," the dourest of the policemen said. "Didn'ttell you we'd get him?"

Johnson jerked his arm down savagely. "I was waitin for you!" he said. "You wouldn't have got me if I hadn't of wanted to get caught. It was my idea." He was addressing the policemen but leering at Sheppard.

Sheppard looked at him coldly.

"Why did you want to get caught?" die reporter asked, running around to get beside Johnson. "Why did you deliberately want to get caught?"

The question and the sight of Sheppard seemed to throw the boy into a fury. "To show up that big tin Jesus I" he hissed and kicked his leg out at Sheppard. "He thinks he's God. I'd radier be in the reformatory than in his house, I'd rather be in die penl The Devil has him in his power. He don't know his left hand from his right, he don't have as much sense as his crazy kid I" He paused and then swept on to his fantastic conclusion. "He made suggestions to me I"

Sheppard's face blanched. He caught hold of the door facing. "Suggestions?" the reporter said eagerly, "what kind of suggestion?"

"Immor'l suggestions!" Johnson said. "What kind of suggestions do you tiiink? But I ain't having none of it, I'm a Christian, I'm . . ."

Sheppard's face was tight with pain. "He knows diat's not true," he said in a shaken voice. "He knows he's lying. I did everything I knew how for him. I did more for him than I did for my own child. I hoped to save him and I failed, but it was an honorable failure. I have nothing to reproach myself with. I made no suggestions to him."

"Do you remember die suggestions?" the reporter asked. "Can you tell us exactly what he said?" "He's a dirty atheist," Johnson said. "He said there wasn't no hell." "Well, they seen each other now," one of the policemen said widi a knowing sigh. "Let's us go."

"Wait," Sheppard said. He came down one step and fixed his eyes on Johnson's eyes in a last desperate effort to save himself. "Tell the trudi, Rufus," he said. "You don't want to perpetrate this lie. You're not evil, you're mortally confused. You don't have to make up for that foot, you don't have to . . ."

Johnson hurled himself forward. "Listen at him!" he screamed. "I lie and steal because I'm good at it! My foot don't have a diing to do widi it! The lame shall enter first! The halt'11 be gadiered together. When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'll save me, not that lying stinking atheist, not diat . . ."

"That'll be enough out of you," die policeman said and yanked him back. "We just wanted you to see we got him," he said to Sheppard, and the two of them turned around and dragged Johnson away, half turned and screaming back at Sheppard.

"The lame'll carry off die prey I" he screeched, but his voice was muffled inside the car. The reporter scrambled into die front seat with die driver and slammed die door and the siren wailed into die darkness.

Sheppard remained diere, bent slightly like a man who has been shot but continues to stand. After a minute he turned and went back in die house and sat down in the chair he had left. He closed his eyes on a picture of Johnson in a circle of reporters at die police station, elaborating his lies. "I have nothing to reproach myself widi," he murmured. His every action had been selfless, his one aim had been to save Johnson for some decent kind of service, he had not spared himself, he had sacrificed his reputation, he had done more for Johnson than he had done for his own child. Foulness hung about him like an odor in the air, so close that it seemed to come from his own breadi. "I have nothing to reproach myself widi," he repeated. His voice sounded dry and harsh. "I did more for him dian I did for my own child." He was swept widi a sudden panic. He heard the boy's jubilant voice. Satan has you in his power.

"I have nothing to reproach myself widi," he began again. "I did more for him dian I did for my own child." He heard his voice as if it were die voice of his

accuser. He repeated die sentence silently.

Slowly his face drained of color. It became almost gray beneath die white halo of his hair. The sentence echoed in his mind, each syllable like a dull blow. His mouth twisted and he closed his eyes against the revelation. Norton's face rose before him, empty, forlorn, his left eye listing almost imperceptibly toward die outer rim as if it could not bear a full view of grief. His heart constricted widi a repulsion for himself so clear and intense diat he gasped for breadi. He had stuffed his own emptiness widi good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself. He saw die clear-eyed Devil, die sounder of hearts, leering at him from die eyes of Johnson. His image of himself shrivelled until everything was black before him. He sat diere paralyzed, aghast.

He saw Norton at the telescope, all back and ears, saw his arm shoot up and wave frantically. A rush of agonizing love for die child rushed over him like a transfusion of life. The little boy's face appeared to him transformed; the image of his salvation; all light. He groaned with joy. He would make everything up to him. He would never let him suffer again. He would be mother and father. He jumped up and ran to his room, to kiss him, to tell him that he loved him, that he would never fail him again.

The light was on in Norton's room but the bed was empty. He turned and dashed up the attic stairs and at the top reeled back like a man on the edge of a pit. The tripod had fallen and the telescope lay on the floor. A few feet over it, the child hung in the jungle of shadows, just below the beam from which he had launched his flight into space.

Why Do the Heathen Rage?

TILMAN had had his stroke in the state capital, where he had gone on business, and he had stayed two weeks in the hospital there. He did not remember his arrival home by ambulance but his wife did. She had sat for two hours on the jump seat at his feet, gazing fixedly at his face. Only his left eye, twisted inward, seemed to harbor his former personality. It burned with rage. The rest of his face was prepared for death. Justice was grim and she took satisfaction in it when she found it. It might take just this ruin to wake Walter up. By accident both children were at home when they arrived. Mary Maud was driving in from school, not realizing that the ambulance was behind her. She got out—a large woman of thirty with a round childish face and a pile of carrot-colored hair that seeped about in an invisible net on top of her head—kissed her mother, glanced at Tilman and gasped; then, grim-faced but flustered, marched behind the rear attendant, giving him high-pitched instructions on how to get the stretcher around the curve of the front steps. Exactly like a schoolteacher, her mother thought. Schoolteacher all over. As the forward attendant reached the porch, Mary Maud said sharply in a voice used to controlling children, "Get up, Walter, and open the door!" Walter was sitting on the edge of his chair, absorbed in the proceedings, his finger folded in the book he had been reading before the ambulance came. He got up and held open the screen door, and while the attendants carried the stretcher across the porch, he gazed, obviously fascinated, at his father's face. "Glad to see you back, capt'n," he said and raised his hand in a sloppy salute. Tilman's enraged left eye appeared to include him in its vision but he gave him no sign of recognition.

Roosevelt, who from now on would be nurse instead of yard man, stood inside the door, waiting. He had put on the white coat that he was supposed to wear for occasions. He peered forward at what was on the stretcher. The bloodshot veins in his eyes swelled. Then, all at once, tears glazed them and glistened on his black cheeks like sweat. Tilman made a weak rough motion with his good arm. It was the only gesture of affection he had given any of them. The Negro followed the stretcher to the back bedroom, snuffling as if someone had hit him.

Mary Maud went in to direct the stretcher bearers. Walter and his mother remained on the porch. "Close the door," she said. "You're letting flies in."

She had been watching him all along, searching for some sign in his big bland face that some sense of urgency had touched him, some sense that now he had to take hold, that now he had to do something, anything—she would have been

glad to see him make a mistake, even make a mess of things if it meant that he was doing something—but she saw that nothing had happened. His eyes were on her, glittering just slightly behind his glasses. He had taken in every detail of Tilman's face; he had registered Roosevelt's tears, Mary Maud's confusion, and now he was studying her to see how she was taking it. She yanked her hat straight, seeing by his eyes that it had slipped toward the back of her head.

"You ought to wear it that way," he said. "It makes you look sort of relaxed-by-mistake." She made her face hard, as hard as she could make it. "The responsibility is yours now," she said in a harsh, final voice.

He stood there with his half smile and said nodiing. Like an absorbent lump, she thought, taking everything in, giving nodiing out. She might have been looking at a stranger using die family face. He had die same noncommittal lawyer's smile as her fadier and grandfather, set in die same heavy jaw, under die same Roman nose; he had die same eyes that were neidier blue nor green nor gray; his skull would soon be bald like dieirs. Her face became even harder. "You'll have to take over and manage diis place," she said and folded her arms, "if you want to stay here."

The smile left him. He looked at her once hard, his expression empty, and then beyond her out across the meadow, beyond the four oaks and die black distant tree line, into the vacant afternoon sky. "I thought it was home," he said, "but it don't do to presume."

Her heart constricted. She had an instant's revelation that he was homeless. Homeless here and homeless anywhere. "Of course it's home," she said, "but somebody has to take over. Somebody has to make diese Negroes work."

"I can't make Negroes work," he muttered. "That's about the last thing I'm capable of."

"I'll tell you everything to do," she said.

"Hal" he said. "That you would." He looked at her and his half smile returned. "Lady," he said, "you're coming into your own. You were born to take over. If the old man had had his stroke ten years ago, we'd all be better off. You could have run a wagon train dirough the Bad Lands. You could stop a mob. You're the last of die nineteendi century, you're. . . ."

"Walter," she said, "you're a man. I'm only a woman." "A woman of your generation," Walter said, "is better than a man of mine."

Her mouth drew into a tight line of outrage and her head trembled almost imperceptibly. "I would be ashamed to say it!" she whispered.

Walter dropped into die chair he had been sitting in and opened his book. A sluggish-looking flush settled on his face. "The only virtue of my generation," he

said, "is diat it ain't ashamed to tell die truth about itself." He was already reading. Her interview was at an end.

She remained standing there, rigid, her eyes on him in stunned disgust. Her son. Her only son. His eyes and his skull and his smile belonged to die family face but underneath diem was a different kind of man from any she had ever known. There was no innocence in him, no rectitude, no conviction eidier of sin or election. The man she saw courted good and evil impartially and saw so many sides of every question that he could not move, he could not work, he could not even make niggers work. Any evil could enter diat vacuum. God knows, she thought and caught her breadi, God knows what he might dol

He had not done anydiing. He was twenty-eight now and, so far as she could see, nothing occupied him but trivia. He had the air of a person who is waiting for some big event and can't start any work because it would only be interrupted. Since he was always idle, she had diought diat perhaps he wanted to be an artist or a philosopher or something, but this was not the case. He did not want to write anything with a name. He amused himself writing letters to people he did not know and to the newspapers. Under different names and using different personalities, he wrote to strangers. It was a peculiar, small, contemptible vice. Her father and her grandfather had been moral men but diey would have scorned small vices more than great ones. They knew who diey were and what they owed to themselves. It was impossible to tell what Walter knew or what his views were on anything. He read books that had nothing to do with anything that mattered now. Often she came behind him and found some strange underlined passage in a book he had left lying somewhere and she would puzzle over it for days. One passage she found in a book "he had left lying on the upstairs-bathroom floor stayed with her ominously.

"Love should be full of anger," it began, and she thought, well mine is. She was furious all the time. It went on, "Since you have already spurned my request, perhaps you will listen to admonishment. What business have you in your father's house, O you effeminate soldier? Where are your ramparts and trenches, where is the winter spent at the front lines? Listen 1 the battle trumpet blares from heaven and see how our General marches fully armed, coming amid the clouds to conquer the whole world. Out of the mouth of our King emerges a double-edged sword that cuts down everything in die way. Arising finally from your nap, do you come to die battlefield! Abandon the shade and seek die sun."

She turned back in die book to see what she was reading. It was a letter from a St. Jerome to a Heliodorus, scolding him for having abandoned the desert. A footnote said diat Heliodorus was one of die famous group that had centered around Jerome at Aquileia in

370. He had accompanied Jerome to die Near East witli die intention of cultivating a hermitic life. They had separated when Heliodorus continued on to Jerusalem. Eventually he returned to Italy, and in later years he became a distinguished churchman as die bishop of Altinum.

This was die kind of diing he read—something diat made no sense for now. Then it came to her, widi an unpleasant little jolt, diat die General widi die sword in his moudi, marching to do violence, was Jesus.

Revelation

THE doctor's waiting room, which was very small, was almost full when die Turpins entered and Mrs. Turpin, who was very large, made it look even smaller by her presence. She stood looming at die head of die magazine table set in die center of it, a living demonstration diat die room was inadequate and ridiculous. Her litde bright black eyes took in all the patients as she sized up die seating situation. There was one vacant chair and a place on die sofa occupied by a blond child in a dirty blue romper who should have been told to move over and make room for die lady. He was five or six, but Mrs. Turpin saw at once diat no one was going to tell him to move over. He was slumped down in die seat, his arms idle at his sides and his eyes idle in his head; his nose ran unchecked. Mrs. Turpin put a firm hand on Claud's shoulder and said in a voice diat included anyone who wanted to listen, "Claud, you sit in diat chair diere," and gave him a push down into die vacant one. Claud was florid and bald and sturdy, somewhat shorter dian Mrs. Turpin, but he sat down as if he were accustomed to doing what she told him to. Mrs. Turpin remained standing. The only man in die room besides Claud was a lean stringy old fellow widi a rusty hand spread out on each knee, whose eyes were closed as if he were asleep ox dead or pretending to be so as not to get up and offer her his seat Her gaze settled agreeably on a well-dressed gray-haired lady whose eyes met hers and whose expression said: if diat child belonged to me, he would have some manners and move over—diere's plenty of room diere for you and him too. Claud looked up with a sigh and made as if to rise.

"Sit down," Mrs. Turpin said. "You know you're not supposed to stand on that leg. He has an ulcer on his leg," she explained.

Claud lifted his foot onto the magazine table and rolled his trouser leg up to reveal a purple swelling on a plump marble-white calf.

"MyI" die pleasant lady said. "How did you do that?"

"A cow kicked him," Mrs. Turpin said.

"Goodness!" said die lady.

Claud rolled his trouser leg down.

"Maybe die litde boy would move over," die lady suggested, but the child did not stir.

"Somebody will be leaving in a minute," Mrs. Turpin said. She could not understand why a doctor—widi as much money as they made charging five dollars a day to just stick dieir head in die hospital door and look at you—

couldn't afford a decent-sized waiting room. This one was hardly bigger than a garage. The table was cluttered with limp-looking magazines and at one end of it tliere was a big green glass ash tray full of cigarette butts and cotton wads widi litde blood spots on diem. If she had had anydiing to do with die running of die place, diat would have been emptied every so often. There were no chairs against the wall at die head of die room, It had a rectangular-shaped panel in it that permitted a view of die office where the nurse came and went and die secretary listened to die radio. A plastic fern in a gold pot sat in die opening and trailed its fronds down almost to the floor. The radio was softly playing gospel music.

Just dien die inner door opened and a nurse with the highest stack of yellow hair Mrs. Turpin had ever seen put her face in die crack and called for the next patient. The woman sitdng beside Claud grasped the two arms of her chair and hoisted herself up; she pulled her dress free from her legs and lumbered dirough die door where die nurse had disappeared.

Mrs. Turpin eased into die vacant chair, which held her tight as a corset. "I wish I could reduce," she said, and rolled her eyes and gave a comic sigh.

"Oh, *you* aren't fat," the stylish lady said.

"Ooooo I am too," Mrs. Turpin said. "Claud he eats all he wants to and never weighs over one hundred and seventy-five pounds, but me I just look at something good to eat and I gain some weight," and her stomach and shoulders shook with laughter. "You can cat all you want to, can't you, Claud?" she asked, turning to him.

Claud only grinned.

"Well, as long as you have such a good disposition," the stylish lady said, "I don't think it makes a bit of difference what size you are. You just can't beat a good disposition."

Next to her was a fat girl of eighteen or nineteen, scowling into a thick blue book which Mrs. Turpin saw was entitled *Human Development.* The girl raised her head and directed her scowl at Mrs. Turpin as if she did not like her looks. She appeared annoyed that anyone should speak while she tried to read. The poor girl's face was blue with acne and Mrs. Turpin thought how pitiful it was to have a face like that at that age. She gave the girl a friendly smile but the girl only scowled the harder. Mrs. Turpin herself was fat but she had always had good skin, and, though she was forty-seven years old, there was not a wrinkle in her face except around her eyes from laughing too much.

Next to the ugly girl was the child, still in exactly die same position, and next to him was a thin leathery old woman in a cotton print dress. She and Claud had three sacks of chicken feed in their pump house that was in the same print. She

had seen from die first that die child belonged with the old woman. She could tell by the way they sat—kind of vacant and white-trashy, as if diey would sit there until Doomsday if nobody called and told diem to get up. And at right angles but next to the well-dressed pleasant lady was a lank-faced woman who was certainly the child's mother. She had on a yellow sweat shirt and wine-colored slacks, both gritty-looking, and die rims of her lips were stained with snuff. Her dirty yellow hair was tied behind with a litde piece of red paper ribbon. Worse than niggers any day, Mrs. Turpin diought.

The gospel hymn playing was, "When I looked up and He looked down," and Mrs. Turpin, who knew it, supplied the last line mentally, "And wona these days I know I'll we-eara crown."

Without appearing to, Mrs. Turpin always noticed people's feet.

The well-dressed lady had on red and gray suede shoes to match her dress. Mrs. Turpin had on her good black patent leather pumps. The ugly girl had on Girl Scout shoes and heavy socks. The old woman had on tennis shoes and die white-trashy mother had on what appeared to be bedroom slippers, black straw with gold braid threaded through diem—exactly what you would have expected her to have on.

Sometimes at night when she couldn't go to sleep, Mrs. Turpin would occupy herself with the question of who she would have chosen to be if she couldn't have been herself. If Jesus had said to her before he made her, "There's only two places available for you. You can eitlier be a nigger or white-trash," what would she have said? "Please, Jesus, please," she would have said, "just let me wait until tliere's another place available," and he would have said, "No, you have to go right now and I have only diose two places so make up your mind." She would have wiggled and squirmed and begged and pleaded but it would have been no use and finally she would have said, "All right, make me a nigger then—but that don't mean a trashy one." And he would have made her a neat clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black.

Next to the child's mother was a red-headed youngish woman, reading one of the magazines and working a piece of chewing gum, hell for leather, as Claud would say. Mrs. Turpin could not see die woman's feet. She was not white-trash, just common. Sometimes Mrs. Turpin occupied herself at night naming the classes of people. On the bottom of die heap were most colored people, not the kind she would have been if she had been one, but most of them; then next to them—not above, just away from—were the white-trash; then above them were the home-owners, and above them the home-and-land owners, to which she and Claud belonged. Above she and Claud were people with a lot of money and much bigger houses and much more land. But here die complexity of it would

begin to bear in on her, for some of the people widi a lot money were common and ought to be below she and Claud and some of die people who had good blood had lost their money and had to rent and then there were colored people who owned their homes and land as well. There was a colored dentist in town who had two red Lincolns and a swimming pool and a farm with registered whiteface cattle on it. Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling and roiling around in her head, and she would dream they were all crammed in together in a box car, being ridden off to be put in a gas oven.

"That's a beautiful clock," she said and nodded to her right. It was a big wall clock, the face encased in a brass sunburst.

"Yes, it's very pretty," the stylish lady said agreeably. "And right on tiie dot too," she added, glancing at her watch.

The ugly girl beside her cast an eye upward at the clock, smirked, then looked directly at Mrs. Turpin and smirked again. Then she returned her eyes to her book. She was obviously the lady's daughter because, although they didn't look anything alike as to disposition, they both had the same shape of face and the same blue eyes. On the lady they sparkled pleasantly but in die girl's seared face diey appeared alternately to smolder and to blaze.

What if Jesus had said, "All right, you can be white-trash or a nigger or ugly"! Mrs. Turpin felt an awful pity for tlie girl, though she thought it was one tiling to be ugly and anotlier to act ugly.

The woman with die snuff-stained lips turned around in her chair and looked up at the clock. Then she turned back and appeared to look a little to die side of Mrs. Turpin. There was a cast in one of her eyes. "You want to know wher you can get you one of tiiemther clocks?" she asked in a loud voice.

"No, I already have a nice clock," Mrs. Turpin said. Once somebody like her got a leg in die conversation,-she would be all over it.

"You can get you one witli green stamps," the woman said. "That's most likely wher he got hisn. Save you up enough, you can get you most anydiang. I got me some joo'ry."

Ought to have got you a wash rag and some soap, Mrs. Turpin thought.

"I get contour sheets witli mine," the pleasant lady said.

The daughter slammed her book shut. She looked straight in front of her, directly dirough Mrs. Turpin and on tJirough die yellow curtain and die plate glass window which made die wall behind her. The girl's eyes seemed lit all of a sudden widi a peculiar light, an unnatural light like night road signs give. Mrs.

Turpin turned her head to see if there was anything going on outside that she should see, but she could not see anything. Figures passing cast only a pale shadow through the curtain. There was no reason the girl should single her out for her ugly looks.

"Miss Finley," the nurse said, cracking the door. The gum-chewing woman got up and passed in front of her and Claud and went into the office. She had on red high-heeled shoes.

Directly across die table, die ugly girl's eyes were fixed on Mrs. Turpin as if she had some very special reason for disliking her.

"This is wonderful weadier, isn't it?" die girl's motiier said.

"It's good weadier for cotton if you can get die niggers to pick it," Mrs. Turpin said, "but niggers don't want to pick cotton any more. You can't get die white folks to pick it and now you can't get die niggers—because tiiey got to be right up diere widi die white folks."

"They gonna *try* anyways," die white-trash woman said, leaning forward. "Do you have one of die cotton-picking machines?" die pleasant lady asked.

"No," Mrs. Turpin said, "tiiey leave half die cotton in die field. We don't have much cotton anyway. If you want to make it farming now, you have to have a little of everything. We got a couple of acres of cotton and a few hogs and chickens and just enough white-face diat Claud can look after diem himself."

"One diang I don't want," die white-trash woman said, wiping her moudi widi die back of her hand. "Hogs. Nasty stinking things, a-grunun and a-roodn all over die place."

Mrs. Turpin gave her die merest edge of her attendon. "Our hogs arc not dirty and tiiey don't sunk," she said. "They're cleaner tlian some children I've seen. Their feet never touch die ground. We have a pig-parlor—diat's where you raise diem on concrete," she explained to die pleasant lady, "and Claud scoots diem down widi die hose every afternoon and washes off die floor." Cleaner by far Ulan diat child right diere, she diought. Poor nasty little tiling. He had not moved except to put die diumb of his dirty hand into his moudi.

The woman turned her face away from Mrs. Turpin. "I know I wouldn't scoot down no hog widi no hose," she said to die wall.

You wouldn't have no hog to scoot down, Mrs. Turpin said to herself.

"A-gruntin and a-rootin and a-groanin," the woman muttered.

"We got a little of everything," Mrs. Turpin said to the pleasant lady. "It's no use in having more dian you can handle yourself widi help like it is. We found enough niggers to pick our cotton diis year but Claud he has to go after them and take them home again in the evening. They can't walk that half a

mile. No they can't. I tell you," she said and laughed merrily, "I sure am tired of buttering up niggers, but you got to love em if you want em to work for you. When they come in the morning, I run out and I say, 'Hi yawl this morning?' and when Claud drives them off to die field I just wave to beat the band and they just wave back." And she waved her hand rapidly to illustrate.

"Like you read out of die same book," die lady said, showing she understood perfectly.

"Child, yes," Mrs. Turpin said. "And when they come in from the field, I run out with a bucket of icewater. That's die way it's going to be from now on," she said. "You may as well face it."

"One thang I know," die white-trash woman said. "Two diangs I ain't going to do: love no niggers or scoot down no hog with no hose." And she let out a bark of contempt.

The look diat Mrs. Turpin and die pleasant lady exchanged indicated diey both understood diat you had to *have* certain things before you could *know* certain tilings. But every time Mrs. Turpin exchanged a look with the lady, she was aware diat die ugly girl's peculiar eyes were still on her, and she had trouble bringing her attention back to the conversation.

"When you got something," she said, "you got to look after it." And when you ain't got a diing but breatli and britches, she added to herself, you can afford to come to town every morning and just sit on the Court House coping and spit.

A grotesque revolving shadow passed across die curtain behind
her and was thrown palely on die opposite wall. Then a bicycle
clattered down against die outside of die building. The door opened
and a colored boy glided in with a tray from die drugstore. It had
two large red and white paper cups on it with tops on diem. He was
a tall, very black boy in discolored white pants and a green nylon shirt. He was chewing gum slowly, as if to music. He set the tray down in die office opening next to die fern and stuck his head dirough to look for the secretary. She was not in there. He rested his arms on die ledge and waited, his narrow bottom stuck out, swaying to die left and right. He raised a hand over his head and scratched die base of his skull.

"You see diat button there, boy?" Mrs. Turpin said. "You can punch diat and she'll come. She's probably in die back somewhere."

"Is dias right?" die boy said agreeably, as if he had never seen die button before. He leaned to die right and put his finger on it. "She sometime out," he said and twisted around to face his audience, his elbows behind him on the counter. The nurse appeared and he twisted back again. She handed him a dollar and he rooted in his pocket and made die change and counted it out to her. She

gave him fifteen cents for a tip and he went out widi die empty tray. The heavy door swung to slowly and closed at lengdi widi die sound of suction. For a moment no one spoke.

"They ought to send all diem niggers back to Africa," die white-trash woman said. "That's wher they come from in die first place." "Oh, I couldn't do without my good colored friends," die pleasant lady said. "There's a heap of things worse dian a nigger," Mrs. Turpin agreed. "It's all kinds of them just like it's all kinds of us." "Yes, and it takes all kinds to make the world go round," die lady said in her musical voice.

As she said it, die raw-complexioned girl snapped her teedi togedier. Her lower lip turned downwards and inside out, revealing die pale pink inside of her mouth. After a second it rolled back up. It was die ugliest face Mrs. Turpin had ever seen anyone make and for a moment she was certain that die girl had made it at her. She was looking at her as if she had known and disliked her all her life—all of Mrs. Turpin's life, it seemed too, not just all die girl's life. Why, girl, I don't even know you, Mrs. Turpin said silently.

She forced her attention back to die discussion. "It wouldn't be practical to send them back to Africa," she said. "They wouldn't want to go. They got it too good here."

"Wouldn't be what diey wanted—if I had anythang to do widi it," die woman said.

"It wouldn't be a way in the world you could get all die niggers back over there," Mrs. Turpin said. "They'd be hiding out and lying down and turning sick on you and wailing and hollering and raring and pitching. It wouldn't be a way in die world to get them over there."

"They got over here," the trashy woman said. "Get back like they got over." "It wasn't so many of tliem then," Mrs. Turpin explained. The woman looked at Mrs. Turpin as if here was an idiot indeed but Mrs. Turpin was not bothered by the look, considering where it came from.

"Nooo," she said, "they're going to stay here where they can go to New York and marry white folks and improve their color. That's what they all want to do, every one of them, improve their color."

"You know what comes of that, don't you?" Claud asked. "No, Claud, what?" Mrs. Turpin said. Claud's eyes twinkled. "White-faced niggers," he said with never a smile.

Everybody in the office laughed except the white-trash and the ugly girl. The girl gripped the book in her lap with white fingers. The trashy woman looked

around her from face to face as if she thought they were all idiots. The old woman in the feed sack dress continued to gaze expressionless across the floor at the high-top shoes of the man opposite her, the one who had been pretending to be asleep when the Turpins came in. He was laughing heartily, his hands still spread out on his knees. The child had fallen to the side and was lying now almost face down in the old woman's lap.

While they recovered from their laughter, the nasal chorus on the radio kept the room from silence.

"You go to blan\ blan\ And I'll go to mine But we'll all blan\ along To-geth-ther, And all along the blan\ We'll hep eachother out Smile-ling in any \ind of Weath-therl"

Mrs. Turpin didn't catch every word but she caught enough to agree with the spirit o£ the song and it turned her thoughts sober. To help anybody out that needed it was her philosophy o£ life. She never spared herself when she found somebody in need, whether they were white or black, trash or decent. And of all she had to be thankful for, she was most thankful that this was so. If Jesus had said, "You can be high society and have all the money you want and be thin and svelte-like, but you can't be a good woman with it," she would have had to say, "Well don't make me that then. Make me a good woman and it don't matter what else, how fat or how ugly or how poor!" Her heart rose. He had not made her a nigger or white-trash or ugly I He had made her herself and given her a little of everything. Jesus, thank you! she said. Thank you thank you thank you! Whenever she counted her blessings she felt as buoyant as if she weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds instead of one hundred and eighty.

"What's wrong with your little boy?" the pleasant lady asked the white-trashy woman.

"He has a ulcer," the woman said proudly. "He ain't give me a minute's peace since he was born. Him and her are just alike," she said, nodding at the old woman, who was running her leathery fingers through the child's pale hair. "Look like I can't get nothing down them two but Co' Cola and candy."

That's all you try to get down em, Mrs. Turpin said to herself. Too lazy to light the fire. There was nothing you could tell her about people like them that she didn't know already. And it was not just that they didn't have anything. Because if you gave them everything, in two weeks it would all be broken or filthy or they would have chopped it up for lightwood. She knew all this from her own experience. Help them you must, but help them you couldn't.

All at once the ugly girl turned her lips inside out again. Her eyes fixed like two drills on Mrs. Turpin. This time there was no mistaking that there was

something urgent behind them.

Girl, Mrs. Turpin exclaimed silently, I haven't done a thing to you! The girl might be confusing her with somebody else. There was no need to sit by and let herself be intimidated. "You must be in college," she said boldly, looking directly at the girl. "I see you reading a book there."

The girl continued to stare and pointedly did not answer.

Her mother blushed at this rudeness. "The lady asked you a question, Mary Grace," she said under her breath.

"I have ears," Mary Grace said.

The poor mother blushed again. "Mary Grace goes to Wellesley College," she explained. She twisted one of the buttons on her dress. "In Massachusetts," she added with a grimace. "And in the summer she just keeps right on studying. Just reads all the time, a real book worm. She's done real well at Wellesley; she's taking English and Math and History and Psychology and Social Studies," she rattled on, "and I think it's too much. I think she ought to get out and have fun."

The girl looked as if she would like to hurl them all through the plate glass window. "Way up nordi," Mrs. Turpin murmured and thought, well, it hasn't done much for her manners.

"I'd almost rather to have him sick," the white-trash woman said, wrenching the attention back to herself. "He's so mean when he ain't. Look like some children just take natural to meanness. It's some gets bad when they get sick but he was the opposite. Took sick and turned good. He don't give me no trouble now. It's me waitin to see die doctor," she said.

If I was going to send anybody back to Africa, Mrs. Turpin thought, it would be your kind, woman. "Yes, indeed," she said aloud, but looking up at the ceiling, "it's a heap of things worse tiian a nigger." And dirtier than a hog, she added to herself.

"I tiiink people with bad dispositions are more to be pitied than anyone on earth," the pleasant lady said in a voice that was decidedly thin.

"I thank the Lord he has blessed me with a good one," Mrs. Turpin said. "The day has never dawned that I couldn't find something to laugh at."

"Not since she married me anyways," Claud said with a comical straight face.

Everybody laughed except the girl and the white-trash.

Mrs. Turpin's stomach shook. "He's such a caution," she said, "that I can't help but laugh at him."

The girl made a loud ugly noise through her teeth.

Her mother's mouth grew thin and tight. "I think the worst thing in the world,"

she said, "is an ungrateful person. To have everything and not appreciate it. I know a girl," she said, "who has parents who would give her anything, a little brotiier who loves her dearly, who is getting a good education, who wears the best clothes, but who can never say a kind word to anyone, who never smiles, who just criticizes and complains all day long."

"Is she too old to paddle?" Claud asked.

The girl's face was almost purple.

"Yes," the lady said, "I'm afraid there's nothing to do but leave her to her folly. Some day she'll wake up and it'll be too late."

"It never hurt anyone to smile," Mrs. Turpin said. "It just makes you feel better all over."

"Of course," the lady said sadly, "but there are just some people you can't tell anything to. They can't take criticism."

"If it's one thing I am," Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, "it's grateful. When I think who all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it isP It could have been differentl" For one thing, somebody else could have got Claud. At the thought of this, she was flooded with gratitude and a terrible pang of joy ran through her. "Oh thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you!" she cried aloud.

The book struck her directly over her left eye. It struck almost at the same instant that she realized the girl was about to hurl it. Before she could utter a sound, the raw face came crashing across the table toward her, howling. The girl's fingers sank like clamps into the soft flesh of her neck. She heard the mother cry out and Claud shout, "Whoa!" There was an instant when she was certain that she was about to be in an earthquake.

All at once her vision narrowed and she saw everything as if it were happening in a small room far away, or as if she were looking at it through the wrong end of a telescope. Claud's face crumpled and fell out of sight. The nurse ran in, then out, then in again. Then the gangling figure of the doctor rushed out of the inner door. Magazines flew this way and that as the table turned over. The girl fell with a thud and Mrs. Turpin's vision suddenly reversed itself and she saw everything large instead of small. The eyes of the whitetrashy woman were staring hugely at the floor. There the girl, held down on one side by the nurse and on the other by her mother, was wrenching and turning in their grasp. The doctor was kneeling astride her, trying to hold her arm down. He managed after a second to sink a long needle into it.

Mrs. Turpin felt entirely hollow except for her heart which swung from side to side as if it were agitated in a great empty drum of flesh.

"Somebody that's not busy call for the ambulance," the doctor said in the off-hand voice young doctors adopt for terrible occasions.

Mrs. Turpin could not have moved a finger. The old man who had been sitting next to her skipped nimbly into the office and made the call, for the secretary still seemed to be gone.

"ClaudI" Mrs. Turpin called.

He was not in his chair. She knew she must jump up and find him but she felt like some one trying to catch a train in a dream, when everything moves in slow motion and the faster you try to run the slower you go.

"Here I am," a suffocated voice, very unlike Claud's, said.

He was doubled up in the corner on the floor, pale as paper, hold ing his leg. She wanted to get up and go to him but she could not move. Instead, her gaze was drawn slowly downward to the churn ing face on die floor, which she could see over the doctor's shoulder.

The girl's eyes stopped rolling and focused on her. They seemed a much lighter blue than before, as if a door that had been tighdy closed behind them was now open to admit light and air.

Mrs. Turpin's head cleared and her power of motion returned. She leaned forward undl she was looking directly into die fierce brilliant eyes. There was no doubt in her mind tiiat die girl did know her, knew her in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition. "What you got to say to me?" she asked hoarsely and held her breadi, waidng, as for a reveladon.

The girl raised her head. Her gaze locked witii Mrs. Turpin's. "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog," she whispered. Her voice was low but clear. Her eyes burned for a moment as if she saw widi pleasure diat her message had struck its target.

Mrs. Turpin sank back in her chair.

After a moment the girl's eyes closed and she turned her head wearily to die side.

The doctor rose and handed die nurse die empty syringe. He leaned over and put bodi hands for a moment on die modier's shoulders, which were shaking. She was sitdng on die floor, her lips pressed together, holding Mary Grace's hand in her lap. The girl's fingers were gripped like a baby's around her diumb. "Go on to die hospital," he said. "I'll call and make die arrangements."

"Now let's see diat neck," he said in a jovial voice to Mrs. Turpin. He began to inspect her neck witii his first two fingers. Two litde moon-shaped lines like pink fish bones were indented over her windpipe. There was die beginning of an

angry red swelling above her eye. His fingers passed over diis also.

"Lea' me be," she said diickly and shook him off. "See about Claud. She kicked him."

"I'll see about him in a minute," he said and felt her pulse. He was a diin gray-haired man, given to pleasantries. "Go home and have yourself a vacadon the rest of die day," he said and patted her on die shoulder.

Quit your pattin me, Mrs. Turpin growled to herself.

"And put an ice pack over diat eye," he said. Then he went and squatted down beside Claud and looked at his leg. After a moment he pulled him up and Claud limped after him into the office.

Undl die ambulance came, die only sounds in the room were die tremulous moans of die girl's mother, who condnued to sit on die floor. The white-trash woman did not take her eyes off die girl. Mrs. Turpin looked straight ahead at nothing. Presently the ambulance drew up, a long dark shadow, behind the curtain. The attendants came in and set the stretcher down beside the girl and lifted her expertly onto it and carried her out. The nurse helped die mother gather up her diings. The shadow of the ambulance moved silently away and the nurse came back in the office.

"That ther girl is going to be a lunadc, ain't she?" die white-trash woman asked the nurse, but the nurse kept on to the back and never answered her.

"Yes, she's going to be a lunatic," the white-trash woman said to die rest of diem.

"Po' critter," the old woman murmured. The child's face was sdll in her lap. His eyes looked idly out over her knees. He had not moved during the disturbance except to draw one leg up under him. "I thank Gawd," the white-trash woman said fervently, "I ain't a lunatic."

Claud came limping out and the Turpins went home.

As their pick-up truck turned into their own dirt road and made the crest of the hill, Mrs. Turpin gripped the window ledge and looked out suspiciously. The land sloped gracefully down through a field dotted with lavender weeds and at the start of the rise their small yellow frame house, with its little flower beds spread out around it like a fancy apron, sat primly in its accustomed place between two giant hickory trees. She would not have been startled to see a burnt wound between two blackened chimneys.

Neither of them felt like eating so they put on their house clothes and lowered the shade in the bedroom and lay down, Claud witli his leg on a pillow and herself with a damp washcloth over her eye. The instant she was flat on her

back, the image of a razorbacked hog with warts on its face and horns coming out behind its ears snorted into her head. She moaned, a low quiet moan.

"I am not," she said tearfully, "a wart hog. From hell." But die denial had no force. The girl's eyes and her words, even the tone of her voice, low but clear, directed only to her, brooked no repudiation. She had been singled out for the message, though diere was trash in the room to whom it might justly have been applied. The full force of this fact struck her only now. There was a woman there who was neglecting her own child but she had been overlooked. The message had been given to Ruby Turpin, a respectable, hard-working, church-going woman. The tears dried. Her eyes began to burn instead with wratli.

She rose on her elbow and the washcloth fell into her hand. Claud was lying on his back, snoring. She wanted to tell him what the girl had said. At the same time, she did not wish to put the image of herself as a wart hog from hell into his mind.

"Hey, Claud," she muttered and pushed his shoulder.

Claud opened one pale baby blue eye.

She tooked into it warily. He did not think about anything. He just went his way.

"Wha, whasit?" he said and closed the eye again.

"Nothing," she said. "Does your leg pain you?"

"Hurts like hell," Claud said.

"It'll quit terreckly," she said and lay back down. In a moment Claud was snoring again. For the rest of the afternoon diey lay there. Claud slept. She scowled at the ceiling. Occasionally she raised her fist and made a small stabbing motion over her chest as if she was defending her innocence to invisible guests who were like the comforters of Job, reasonable-seeming but wrong.

About five-thirty Claud stirred. "Got to go after those niggers," he sighed, not moving.

She was looking straight up as if there were unintelligible handwriting on die ceiling. The protuberance over her eye had turned a greenish-blue. "Listen here," she said.

"What?"

"Kiss me."

Claud leaned over and kissed her loudly on the moudi. He pinched her side and their hands interlocked. Her expression of ferocious concentration did not change. Claud got up, groaning and growling, and limped off. She continued to study the ceiling.

She did not get up until she heard the pick-up truck coming back widi the Negroes. Then she rose and thrust her feet in her brown oxfords, which she did

not bother to lace, and stumped out onto die back porch and got her red plastic bucket. She emptied a tray of ice cubes into it and filled it half full of water and went out into the back yard. Every afternoon after Claud brought the hands in, one of die boys helped him put out hay and the rest waited in die back of the truck until he was ready to take them home. The truck was parked in the shade under one of the hickory trees.

"Hi yawl diis evening?" Mrs Turpin asked grimly, appearing widi die bucket and die dipper. There were three women and a boy in the truck.

"Us doin nicely," the oldest woman said. "Hi you doin?" and her gaze stuck immediately on die dark lump on Mrs. Turpin's forehead. "You done fell down, ain't you?" she asked in a solicitous voice. The old woman was dark and almost toothless. She had on an old felt hat of Claud's set back on her head. The odier two women were younger and lighter and they both had new bright green sunhats. One of them had hers on her head; the other had taken hers off and the boy was grinning beneath it.

Mrs. Turpin set the bucket down on the floor of the truck. "Yawl hep yourselves," she said. She looked around to make sure Claud had gone. "No, I didn't fall down," she said, folding her arms. "It was something worse than that."

"Ain't nothing bad happen to you!" the old woman said. She said it as if they all knew that Mrs. Turpin was protected in some special way by Divine Providence. "You just had you a little fall."

"We were in town at the doctor's office for where the cow kicked Mr. Turpin," Mrs. Turpin said in a flat tone that indicated they could leave off their foolishness. "And there was this girl there. A big fat girl with her face all broke out. I could look at that girl and tell she was peculiar but I couldn't tell how. And me and her mama was just talking and going along and all of a sudden WHAM! She throws this big book she was reading at me and . . ."

"Naw!" the old woman cried out.

"And then she jumps over the table and commences to choke me." "Naw!" they all exclaimed, "naw!" "Hi come she do that?" die old woman asked. "What ail her?" Mrs. Turpin only glared in front of her. "Somethin ail her," the old woman said. "They carried her off in an ambulance," Mrs. Turpin continued,

"but before she went she was rolling on the floor and they were trying to hold her down to give her a shot and she said something to me." She paused. "You know what she said to me?"

"What she say?" they asked.

"She said," Mrs. Turpin began, and stopped, her face very dark and heavy. The sun was getting whiter and whiter, blanching the

sky overhead so that the leaves of the hickory tree were black in
the face of it. She could not bring forth the words. "Something real ugly," she muttered.

"She sho shouldn't said nothin ugly to you," the old woman said. "You so sweet. You the sweetest lady I know."

"She pretty too," the one with the hat on said.

"And stout," die other one said. "I never knowed no sweeter white lady." "That's tile truth befo' Jesus," the old woman said. "Amenl You des as sweet and pretty as you can be."

Mrs. Turpin knew exactly how much Negro flattery was worth and it added to her rage. "She said," she began again and finished this time with a fierce rush of breath, "that I was an old wart hog from hell."

There was an astounded silence.

"Where she at?" the youngest woman cried in a piercing voice. "Lcmme see her. I'll kill her!"

"I'll kill her with you!" the odier one cried.

"She b'long in the sylum," the old woman said emphatically. "You die sweetest white lady I know." "She pretty too," the odier two said. "Stout as she can be and sweet. Jesus satisfied witii her!"

"Deed he is," die old woman declared.

Idiots! Mrs. Turpin growled to herself. You could never say anytiiing intelligent to a nigger. You could talk at tiiem but not witii tiiem. "Yawl ain't drunk your water," she said shordy. "Leave tile bucket in die truck when you're finished with it. I got more to do tiian just stand around and pass the time of day," and she moved off and into die house.

She stood for a moment in the middle of the kitchen. The dark protuberance over her eye looked like a miniature tornado cloud which might any moment sweep across tiie horizon of her brow. Her lower lip protruded dangerously. She squared her massive shoulders. Then she marched into tiie front of die house and out die side door and started down die road to die pig parlor. She had die look of a woman going single-handed, weaponless, into battle.

The sun was a deep yellow now like a harvest moon and was riding westward very fast over the far tree line as if it meant to reach die hogs before she did. The road was rutted and she kicked several good-sized stones out of her patii as she strode along. The pig parlor was on a little knoll at tiie end of a lane diat ran off from tiie side of die barn. It was a square of concrete as large as a small room, with a board fence about four feet high around it. The concrete floor sloped slightly so that the hog wash could drain off into a trench where it was carried to

the field for fertilizer. Claud was standing on the outside, on the edge of the concrete, hanging onto the top board, hosing down the floor inside. The hose was connected to the faucet of a water trough nearby.

Mrs. Turpin climbed up beside him and glowered down at the hogs inside. There were seven long-snouted bristly shoats in it— tan with liver-colored spots —and an old sow a few weeks off from farrowing. She was lying on her side grunting. The shoats were running about shaking themselves like idiot children, their little slit pig eyes searching the floor for anything left. She had read that pigs were the most intelligent animal. She doubted it. They were supposed to be smarter than dogs. There had even been a pig astronaut. He had performed his assignment perfectly but died of a heart attack afterwards because they left him in his electric suit, sitting upright throughout his examination when naturally a hog should be on all fours.

A-gruntin and a-rootin and a-groanin. "Gimme that hose," she said, yanking it away from Claud. "Go on and carry them niggers home and then get off that leg."

"You look like you might have swallowed a mad dog," Claud observed, but he got down and limped off. He paid no attention to her humors.

Until he was out of earshot, Mrs. Turpin stood on the side of the pen, holding the hose and pointing the stream of water at the hind quarters of any shoat that looked as if it might try to lie down. When he had had time to get over the hill, she turned her head slightly and her wrathful eyes scanned die path. He was nowhere in sight. She turned back again and seemed to gather herself up. Her shoulders rose and she drew in her breath.

"What do you send me a message like that for?" she said in a low fierce voice, barely above a whisper but with the force of a shout in its concentrated fury. "How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?" Her free fist was knotted and with die other she gripped the hose, blindly pointing the stream of water in and out of the eye of the old sow whose outraged squeal she did not hear.

The pig parlor commanded a view of the back pasture where their twenty beef cows were gathered around the hay-bales Claud and the boy had put out. The freshly cut pasture sloped down to the highway. Across it was their cotton field and beyond that a dark green dusty wood which they owned as well. The sun was behind the wood, very red, looking over the paling of trees like a farmer inspecting his own hogs.

"Why me?" she rumbled. "It's no trash around here, black or white, that I haven't given to. And break my back to the bone every day working. And do for

the church."

She appeared to be die right size woman to command the arena before her. "How am I a hog?" she demanded. "Exactly how am I like diem?" and she jabbed the stream of water at die shoats. "There was plenty of trash there. It didn't have to be me.

"If you like trash better, go get yourself some trash then," she railed. "You could have made me trash. Or a nigger. If trash is what you wanted why didn't you make me trash?" She shook her fist with the hose in it and a watery snake appeared momentarily in die air. "I could quit working and take it easy and be fikhy," she growled. "Lounge about the sidewalks all day drinking root beer. Dip snuff and spit in every puddle and have it all over my face. I could be nasty.

"Or you could have made me a nigger. It's too late for me to be a nigger," she said with deep sarcasm, "but I could act like one. Lay down in the middle of the road and stop traffic. Roll on die ground."

In the deepening light everything was taking on a mysterious hue. The pasture was growing a peculiar glassy green and the streak of highway had turned lavender. She braced herself for a final assault and diis time her voice rolled out over die pasture. "Go on," she yelled, "call me a hogl Call me a hog again. From hell. Call me a wart hog from hell. Put diat bottom rail on top. There'll sdll be a top and bottom!"

A garbled echo returned to her. A final surge of fury shook her and she roared, "Who do you diink you are?" The color of everydiing, field and crimson sky, burned for a moment widi a transparent intensity. The question carried over the pasture and across the highway and the cotton field and returned to her clearly like an answer from beyond the wood.

She opened her mouth but no sound came out of it.

A tiny truck, Claud's, appeared on the highway, heading rapidly out of sight. Its gears scraped thinly. It looked like a child's toy. At any moment a bigger truck might smash into it and scatter Claud's and the niggers' brains all over the road.

Mrs. Turpin stood there, her gaze fixed on the highway, all her muscles rigid, until in five or six minutes the truck reappeared, returning. She waited until it had had time to turn into their own road. Then like a monumental statue coming to life, she bent her head slowly and gazed, as if through the very heart of mystery, down into the pig parlor at the hogs. They had settled all in one corner around the old sow who was grunting softly. A red glow suffused diem. They appeared to pant with a secret life.

Until the sun slipped finally behind the tree line, Mrs. Turpin remained there

with her gaze bent to diem as if she were absorbing some abysmal life-giving knowledge. At last she lifted her head. There was only a purple streak in the sky, cutting dirough a field of crimson and leading, like an extension of the highway, into die descending dusk. She raised her hands from the side of the pen in a gesture hieratic and profound. A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from die earth dirough a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for die first time-in dieir lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up die end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as diose who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little
of everything and die God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind die odiers with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even dieir virtues were being burned away. She lowered her hands and gripped die rail of the hog pen, her eyes small but fixed unblinkingly on what lay ahead. In a moment the vision faded but she remained where she was, immobile.

At lengdi she got down and turned off the faucet and made her slow way on the darkening path to the house. In the woods around her the invisible cricket choruses had struck up, but what she heard were die voices of the souls climbing upward into die starry field and shouting hallelujah.

Parker's Back

PARKER'S wife was sitting on the front porch floor, snapping beans. Parker was sitting on the step, some distance away, watching her sullenly. She was plain, plain. The skin on her face was thin and drawn as tight as the skin on an onion and her eyes were gray and sharp like the points of two icepicks. Parker understood why he had married her—he couldn't have got her any other way—but he couldn't understand why he stayed with her now. She was pregnant and pregnant women were not his favorite kind. Nevertheless, he stayed as if she had him conjured. He was puzzled and ashamed of himself. The house they rented sat alone save for a single tall pecan tree on a high embankment overlooking a highway. At intervals a car would shoot past below and his wife's eyes would swerve suspiciously after the sound of it and then come back to rest on the newspaper full of beans in her lap. One of the things she did not approve of was automobiles. In addition to her other bad qualities, she was forever sniffing up sin. She did not smoke or dip, drink whiskey, use bad language or paint her face, and God knew some paint would have improved it, Parker thought. Her being against color, it was the more remarkable she had married him. Sometimes he supposed that she had married him because she meant to save him. At other times he had a suspicion that she actually liked everything she said she didn't. He could account for her one way or another; it was himself he could not understand. She turned her head in his direction and said, "It's no reason you can't work for a man. It don't have to be a woman." "Aw shut your mouth for a change," Parker muttered. If he had been certain she was jealous of the woman he worked
for he would have been pleased but more likely she was concerned with the sin that would result if he and the woman took a liking to each other. He had told her that die woman was a hefty young blonde; in fact she was nearly seventy years old and too dried up to have an interest in anydiing except getting as much work out of him as she could. Not that an old woman didn't sometimes get an interest in a young man, particularly if he was as attractive as Parker felt he was, but diis old woman looked at him die same way she looked at her old tractor—as if she had to put up with it because it was all she had. The tractor had broken down the second day Parker was on it and she had set him at once to cutting bushes, saying out of die side of her moudi to die nigger, "Everydiing he touches, he breaks." She also asked him to wear his shirt when he worked; Parker had removed it even diough the day was not sultry;

he put it back on reluctantly.

This ugly woman Parker married was his first wife. He had had odier women but he had planned never to get himself tied up legally. He had first seen her one morning when his truck broke down on the highway. He had managed to pull it off die road into a neady swept yard on which sat a peeling two-room house. He got out and opened the hood of the truck and began to study the motor. Parker had an extra sense diat told him when there was a woman nearby watching him. After he had leaned over die motor a few minutes, his neck began to prickle. He cast his eye over the empty yard and porch of die house. A woman he could not see was either nearby beyond a clump of honeysuckle or in die house, watching him out die window.

Suddenly Parker began to jump up and down and fling his hand about as if he had mashed it in die machinery. He doubled over and held his hand close to his chest. "God dammit I" he hollered, "Jesus Christ in hell! Jesus God Almighty damml God dammit to hell!" he went on, flinging out die same few oatlis over and over as loud as he could.

Widiout warning a terrible bristly claw slammed die side of his face and he fell backwards on die hood of die truck. "You don't talk no film here!" a voice close to him shrilled.

Parker's vision was so blurred diat for an instant he diought he had been attacked by some creature from above, a giant hawk-eyed angel wielding a hoary weapon. As his sight cleared, he saw before him a tall raw-boned girl with a broom.

"I hurt my hand," he said. "I HURT my hand." He was so incensed that he forgot diat he hadn't hurt his hand. "My hand may be broke," he growled although his voice was still unsteady.

"Lemme see it," the girl demanded.

Parker stuck out his hand and she came closer and looked at it. There was no mark on the palm and she took the hand and turned it over. Her own hand was dry and hot and rough and Parker felt himself jolted back to life by her touch. He looked more closely at her. I don't want nothing to do with this one, he thought.

The girl's sharp eyes peered at die back of the stubby reddish hand she held. There emblazoned in red and blue was a tattooed eagle perched on a cannon. Parker's sleeve was rolled to die elbow. Above the eagle a serpent was coiled about a shield and in die spaces between the eagle and the serpent there were hearts, some with arrows through diem. Above die serpent diere was a spread hand of cards. Every space on the skin of Parker's arm, from wrist to elbow, was covered in some loud design. The girl gazed at this with an almost stupefied

smile of shock, as if she had accidentally grasped a poisonous snake; she dropped die hand.

"I got most of my other ones in foreign parts," Parker said. "These here I mostly got in die United States. I got my first one when I was only fifteen year old."

"Don't tell me," the girl said, "I don't like it. I ain't got any use for it."

"You ought to see the ones you can't see," Parker said and winked.

Two circles of red appeared like apples on die girl's cheeks and softened her appearance. Parker was intrigued. He did not for a minute diink diat she didn't like the tattoos. He had never yet met a woman who was not attracted to diem.

Parker was fourteen when he saw a man in a fair, tattooed from head to foot. Except for his loins which were girded with a panther hide, die man's skin was patterned in what seemed from Parker's distance—he was near the back of the tent, standing on a bench—a single intricate design of brilliant color. The man, who was small and sturdy, moved about on the platform, flexing his muscles so that the arabesque of men and beasts and flowers on his skin appeared to have a subtle motion of its own. Parker was filled with emotion, lifted up as some people are when the flag passes. He was a boy whose mouth habitually hung open. He was heavy and earnest, as ordinary as a loaf of bread. When the show was over, he had remained standing on the bench, staring where the tattooed man had been, until the tent was almost empty.

Parker had never before felt the least motion of wonder in himself. Until he saw the man at the fair, it did not enter his head that there was anything out of the ordinary about the fact that he existed. Even then it did not enter his head, but a peculiar unease settled in him. It was as if a blind boy had been turned so gently in a different direction that he did not know his destination had been changed.

He had his first tattoo some time after—the eagle perched on the cannon. It was done by a local artist. It hurt very litde, just enough to make it appear to Parker to be worth doing. This was peculiar too for before he had thought that only what did not hurt was worth doing. The next year he quit school because he was sixteen and could. He went to the trade school for a while, then he quit the trade school and worked for six months in a garage. The only reason he worked at all was to pay for more tattoos. His mother worked in a laundry and could support him, but she would not pay for any tattoo except her name on a heart, which he had put on, grumbling. However, her name was Betty Jean and nobody had to know it was his mother. He found out that the tattoos were attractive to the kind of girls he liked but who had never liked him before. He began to drink beer and get in fights. His mother wept over what was becoming of him. One

night she dragged him off to a revival with her, not telling him where they were going. When he saw the big lighted church, he jerked out of her grasp and ran. The next day he lied about his age and joined the navy.

Parker was large for the tight sailor's pants but the silly white cap, sitting low on his forehead, made his face by contrast look thoughtful and almost intense. After a month or two in the navy, his mouth ceased to hang open. His features hardened into the features of a man. He stayed in the navy five years and seemed a natural part of the gray mechanical ship, except for his eyes, which were die same pale slate-color as die ocean and reflected die immense spaces around him as if they were a microcosm of die mysterious sea. In port Parker wandered about comparing the run-down places he was in to Birmingham, Alabama. Everywhere he went he picked up more tattoos.

He had stopped having lifeless ones like anchors and crossed rifles. He had a tiger and a pandier on each shoulder, a cobra coiled about a torch on his chest, hawks on his thighs, Elizabeth II and Philip over where his stomach and liver were respectively. He did not care much what the subject was so long as it was colorful; on his abdomen he had a few obscenities but only because that seemed die proper place for diem. Parker would be satisfied with each tattoo about a mondi, dien somediing about it that had attracted him would wear off. Whenever a decent-sized mirror was available, he would get in front of it and study his overall look. The effect was not of one intricate arabesque of colors but of somediing haphazard and botched. A huge dissatisfaction would come over him and he would go off and find another tattooist and have another space filled up. The front of Parker was almost completely covered but diere were no tattoos on his back. He had no desire for one anywhere he could not readily see it himself. As the space on die front of him for tattoos decreased, his dissatisfaction grew and became general.

After one of his furloughs, he didn't go back to the navy but remained away without official leave, drunk, in a rooming house in a city he did not know. His dissatisfaction, from being chronic and latent, had suddenly become acute and raged in him. It was as if die panther and the lion and the serpents and die eagles and die hawks had penetrated his skin and lived inside him in a raging warfare. The navy caught up with him, put him in die brig for nine months and then gave him a dishonorable discharge.

After diat Parker decided that country air was the only kind fit to breadie. He rented the shack on the embankment and bought the old truck and took various jobs which he kept as long as it suited him. At the time he met his future wife, he was buying apples by die bushel and selling diem for die same price by die pound to

isolated homesteaders on back country roads.

"All that there," the woman said, pointing to his arm, "is no better than what a fool Indian would do. It's a heap of vanity." She seemed to have found the word she wanted. "Vanity of vanities," she said.

Well what die hell do I care what she thinks of it? Parker asked himself, but he was plainly bewildered. "I reckon you like one of these better than another anyway," he said, dallying until he thought of somediing diat would impress her. He thrust the arm back at her. "Which you like best?"

"None of them," she said, "but the chicken is not as bad as the rest."

"What chicken?" Parker almost yelled.

She pointed to the eagle.

"That's an eagle," Parker said. "What fool would waste tlieir time having a chicken put on themself ?"

"What fool would have any of it?" the girl said and turned away. She went slowly back to die house and left him diere to get going. Parker remained for almost five minutes, looking agape at die dark door she had entered.

The next day he returned with a bushel of apples. He was not one to be outdone by anything that looked like her. He liked women with meat on them, so you didn't feel dieir muscles, much less their old bones. When he arrived, she was sitting on the top step and the yard was full of children, all as diin and poor as herself; Parker remembered it was Saturday. He hated to be making up to a woman when there were children around, but it was fortunate he had brought the bushel of apples off the truck. As the children approached him to see what he carried, he gave each child an apple and told it to get lost; in that way he cleared out the whole crowd.

The girl did nothing to acknowledge his presence. He might have been a stray pig or goat that had wandered into the yard and she too tired to take up the broom and send it off. He set the bushel of apples down next to her on die step. He sat down on a lower step.

"Hep yourself," he said, nodding at the basket; then he lapsed into silence.

She took an apple quickly as if the basket might disappear if she didn't make haste. Hungry people made Parker nervous. He had always had plenty to eat himself. He grew very uncomfortable.

He reasoned he had nothing to say so why should he say it? He could not think now why he had come or why he didn't go before he wasted another bushel of apples on die crowd of children. He supposed they were her brothers and sisters.

She chewed the apple slowly but with a kind of relish of concentration, bent slightly but looking out ahead. The view from the porch stretched off across a long incline studded with iron weed and across the highway to a vast vista of

hills and one small mountain. Long views depressed Parker. You look out into space like that and you begin to feel as if someone were after you, the navy or the government or religion.

"Who them children belong to, you?" he said at length.

"I ain't married yet," she said. "They belong to momma." She said it as if it were only a matter of time before she would be married.

Who in God's name would marry her? Parker thought.

A large barefooted woman with a wide gap-toodied face appeared in the door behind Parker. She had apparently been there for several minutes.

"Good evening," Parker said.

The woman crossed the porch and picked up what was left of die bushel of apples. "We thank you," she said and returned with it into the house.

"That your old woman?" Parker muttered.

The girl nodded. Parker knew a lot of sharp things he could have said like "You got my sympathy," but he. was gloomily silent. He just sat there, looking at the view. He thought he must be coming down widi something.

"If I pick up some peaches tomorrow I'll bring you some," he said.

"I'll be much obliged to you," the girl said.

Parker had no intention of taking any basket of peaches back there but die next day he found himself doing it. He and die girl

had almost nothing to say to each odier. One tiling he did say was, "I ain't got any tattoo on my back."

"What you got on it?" the girl said.

"My shirt," Parker said. "Haw."

"Haw, haw," the girl said politely.

Parker thought he was losing his mind. He could not believe for a minute that he was attracted to a woman like this. She showed not the least interest in anything but what he brought until he appeared the third time with two cantaloups. "What's your name?" she asked.

"O. E. Parker," he said.

"What does the O. E. stand for?"

"You can just call me O. E.," Parker said. "Or Parker. Don't nobody call me by my name."

"What's it stand for?" she persisted.

"Never mind," Parker said. "What's yours?"

"I'll tell you when you tell me what diem letters are the short of," she said. There was just a hint of flirtatiousness in her tone and it went rapidly to Parker's head. He had never revealed the name to any man or woman, only to the files of the navy and the government, and it was on his baptismal record which he got at

the age of a mondi; his mother was a Methodist. When the name leaked out of the navy files, Parker narrowly missed killing the man who used it.

"You'll go blab it around," he said. "I'll swear I'll never tell nobody," she said. "On God's holy word I swear it."

Parker sat for a few minutes in silence. Then he reached for the girl's neck, drew her ear close to his mouth and revealed the name in low voice.

"Obadiah," she whispered. Her face slowly brightened as if the name came as a sign to her. "Obadiah," she said.

The name still stank in Parker's estimation.

"Obadiah Elihue," she said in a reverent voice.

"If you call me that aloud, I'll bust your head open," Parker said. "What's yours?" "Sarah Ruth Cates," she said. "Glad to meet you, Sarah Ruth," Parker said. Sarah Ruth's fadier was a Straight Gospel preacher but he was

away, spreading it in Florida. Her mother did not seem to mind his attention to the girl so long as he brought a basket of something with him when he came. As for Sarah Ruth herself, it was plain to Parker after he had visited three times that she was crazy about him. She liked him even though she insisted that pictures on the skin were vanity of vanities and even after hearing him curse, and even after she had asked him if he was saved and he had replied that he didn't see it was anything in particular to save him from. After that, inspired, Parker had said, "I'd be saved enough if you was to kiss me."

She scowled. "That ain't being saved," she said.

Not long after that she agreed to take a ride in his truck. Parker parked it on a deserted road and suggested to her diat they lie down together in the back of it.

"Not until after we're married," she said—just like that.

"Oh that ain't necessary," Parker said and as he reached for her, she thrust him away with such force that die door of die truck came off and he found himself flat on his back on the ground. He made up his mind then and there to have nothing further to do with her.

They were married in the County Ordinary's office because Sarah Ruth thought churches were idolatrous. Parker had no opinion about that one way or the other. The Ordinary's office was lined with cardboard file boxes and record books with dusty yellow slips of paper hanging on out of them. The Ordinary was an old woman with red hair who had held office for forty years and looked as dusty as her books. She married them from behind the iron-grill of a stand-up desk and when she finished, she said with a flourish, "Three dollars and fifty cents and till death do you part!" and yanked some forms out of a machine.

Marriage did not change Sarah Ruth a jot and it made Parker gloomier than

ever. Every morning he decided he had had enough and would not return that night; every night he returned. Whenever Parker couldn't stand die way he felt, he would have anodier tattoo, but the only surface left on him now was his back. To see a tattoo on his own back he would have to get two mirrors and stand between diem in just die correct position and diis seemed to Parker a good way to make an idiot of himself. Sarah Ruth who, if she had had better sense, could have enjoyed a tattoo on his back, would not even look at the ones he had elsewhere. When he attempted to point out especial details of them, she would shut her eyes tight and turn her back as well. Except in total darkness, she preferred Parker dressed and with his sleeves rolled down.

"At the judgement seat of God, Jesus is going to say to you, 'What you been doing all your life besides have pictures drawn all over you?'" she said.

"You don't fool me none," Parker said, "you're just afraid that hefty girl I work for'11 like me so much she'll say, 'Come on, Mr. Parker, let's you and me . . .'"

"You're tempting sin," she said, "and at the judgement seat of God you'll have to answer for that too. You ought to go back to selling the fruits of the earth."

Parker did nothing much when he was at home but listen to what the judgement seat of God would be like for him if he didn't change his ways. When he could, he broke in with tales of the hefty girl he worked for. " 'Mr. Parker,'" he said she said, 'I hired you for your brains.'" (She had added, "So why don't you use them?")

"And you should have seen her face the first time she saw me without my shirt," he said. " 'Mr. Parker,' she said, 'you're a walking panner-rammer!'" This had, in fact, been her remark but it had been delivered out of one side of her mouth.

Dissatisfaction began to grow so great in Parker that there was no containing it outside of a tattoo. It had to be his back. There was no help for it. A dim half-formed inspiration began to work in his mind. He visualized having a tattoo put there that Sarah Ruth would not be able to resist—a religious subject. He thought of an open book with HOLY BIBLE tattooed under it and an actual verse printed on the page. This seemed just the thing for a while; then he began to hear her say, "Ain't I already got a real Bible? What you think I want to read the same verse over and over for when I can read it all?" He needed something better even than the Bible I He thought about it so much that he began to lose sleep. He was already losing flesh—Sarah Ruth just threw food in the pot and let it boil. Not knowing for certain why he continued to stay with a woman who was both ugly and pregnant and no cook made him generally nervous and irritable, and he developed a little tic in the side of his face.

Once or twice he found himself turning around abruptly as if someone were

trailing him. He had had a granddaddy who had ended in the state mental hospital, aldiough not until he was seventy-five, but as urgent as it might be for him to get a tattoo, it was just as urgent that he get exactly the right one to bring Sarah Rudi to heel. As he continued to worry over it, his eyes took on a hollow preoccupied expression. The old woman he worked for told him that if he couldn't keep his mind on what he was doing, she knew where she could find a fourteen-year-old colored boy who could. Parker was too preoccupied even to be offended. At any time previous, he would have left her then and there, saying drily, "Well, you go ahead on and get him then."

Two or diree mornings later he was baling hay with the old woman's sorry baler and her broken down tractor in a large field, cleared save for one enormous old tree standing in die middle of it. The old woman was die kind who would not cut down a large old tree because it was a large old tree. She had pointed it out to Parker as if he didn't have eyes and told him to be careful not to hit it as the machine picked up hay near it. Parker began at die outside of the field and made circles inward toward it. He had to get off die tractor every now and then and untangle the baling cord or kick a rock out of die way. The old woman had told him to carry the rocks to die edge of die field, which he did when she was there watching. When he thought he could make it, he ran over them. As he circled the field his mind was on a suitable design for his back. The sun, the size of a golf ball, began to switch regularly from in front to behind him, but he appeared to see it bodi places as if he had eyes in the back of his head. All at unce he saw die tree reaching out to grasp him. A ferocious diud propelled him into the air, and he heard himself yelling in an unbelievably loud voice, "GOD ABOVE!"

He landed on his back while die tractor crashed upside down into the tree and burst into flame. The first diing Parker saw were his shoes, quickly being eaten by die fire; one was caught under die tractor, die odier was some distance away, burning by itself. He was not in them. He could feel the hot breadi of die burning tree on his face. He scrambled backwards, sull sitting, his eyes cavernous, and if he had known how to cross himself he would have done it.

His truck was on a dirt road at the edge of the field. He moved toward it, still sitting, still backwards, but faster and faster; halfway to it he got up and began a kind of forward-bent run from which he collapsed on his knees twice. His legs felt like two old rusted rain gutters. He reached the truck finally and took off in it, zigzagging up the road. He drove past his house on the embankment and straight for the city, fifty miles distant.

Parker did not allow himself to think on the way to the city. He only knew that

there had been a great change in his life, a leap forward into a worse unknown, and that there was nothing he could do about it. It was for all intents accomplished.

The artist had two large cluttered rooms over a chiropodist's office on a back street. Parker, still barefooted, burst silently in on him at a little after three in the afternoon. The artist, who was about Parker's own age—twenty-eight—but thin and bald, was behind a small drawing table, tracing a design in green ink. He looked up with an annoyed glance and did not seem to recognize Parker in the hollow-eyed creature before him.

"Let me see the book you got with all the pictures of God in it," Parker said breathlessly. "The religious one." The artist continued to look at him with his intellectual, superior stare. "I don't put tattoos on drunks," he said. "You know me!" Parker cried indignantly. "I'm O. E. Parker! You done work for me before and I always paid!"

The artist looked at him another moment as if he were not altogether sure. "You've fallen off some," he said. "You must have been in jail."

"Married," Parker said.

"Oh," said the artist. With the aid of mirrors the artist had tattooed on the top of his head a miniature owl, perfect in every detail. It was about the size of a half-dollar and served him as a show piece. There were cheaper artists in town but Parker had never wanted anything but the best. The artist went over to a cabinet at the back of the room and began to look over some art books. "Who are you interested in?" he said, "saints, angels, Christs or what?"

"God," Parker said.

"Father, Son or Spirit?" "Just God," Parker said impatiently. "Christ. I don't care. Just so it's God."

The artist returned widi a book. He moved some papers off anodier table and put die book down on it and told Parker to sit down and see what he liked. "The up-t-date ones are in die back," he said.

Parker sat down with the book and wet his diumb. He began to go through it, beginning at die back where die up-to-date pictures were. Some of diem he recognized—The Good Shepherd, Forbid Them Not, The Smiling Jesus, Jesus die Physician's Friend, but he kept turning rapidly backwards and die pictures became less and less reassuring. One showed a gaunt green dead face streaked widi blood. One was yellow with sagging purple eyes. Parker's heart began to beat faster and faster until it appeared to be roaring inside him like a great generator. He flipped die pages quickly, feeling diat when he reached the one ordained, a sign would come. He continued to flip dirough until he had almost

reached die front of die book. On one of the pages a pair of eyes glanced at him swiftly. Parker sped on, dien stopped. His heart too appeared to cut off; diere was absolute silence. It said as plainly as if silence were a language itself, GO BACK.

Parker returned to the picture—die haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ widi all-demanding eyes. He sat diere trembling; his heart began slowly to beat again as if it were being brought to life by a subtle power.

"You found what you want?" the artist asked. Parker's diroat was too dry to speak. He got up and thrust die book at die artist, opened at the picture. "That'll cost you plenty," die artist said. "You don't want all those little blocks diough, just die outline and some better features."

"Just like it is," Parker said, "just like it is or nothing."

"It's your funeral," the artist said, "but I don't do diat kind of work for nothing." "How much?" Parker asked. "It'll take maybe two days work." "How much?" Parker said.

"On time or cash?" the artist asked. Parker's other jobs had been on time, but he had paid.

"Ten down and ten for every day it takes," the artist said.

Parker drew ten dollar bills out of his wallet; he had three left in.

"You come back in the morning," the artist said, putting the money in his own pocket. "First I'll have to trace that out of the book." "No no!" Parker said. "Trace it now or gimme my money back," and his eyes blared as if he were ready for a fight.

The artist agreed. Any one stupid enough to want a Christ on his back, he reasoned, would be just as likely as not to change his mind the next minute, but once the work was begun he could hardly do so.

While he worked on tlie tracing, he told Parker to go wash his back at the sink with the special soap he used there. Parker did it and returned to pace back and forth across the room, nervously flexing his shoulders. He wanted to go look at the picture again but at the same time he did not want to. The artist got up finally and had Parker lie down on the table. He swabbed his back with ethyl chloride and then began to outline the head on it with his iodine pencil. Another hour passed before he took up his electric instrument. Parker felt no particular pain. In Japan he had had a tattoo of the Buddha done on his upper arm with ivory needles; in Burma, a little brown root of a man had made a peacock on each of his knees using thin pointed sticks, two feet long; amateurs had worked on him with pins and soot. Parker was usually so relaxed and easy under the hand of the

artist that he often went to sleep, but this time he remained awake, every muscle taut.

At midnight the artist said he was ready to quit. He propped one mirror, four feet square, on a table by the wall and took a smaller mirror off the lavatory wall and put it in Parker's hands. Parker stood with his back to the one on the table and moved the other until he saw a flashing burst of color reflected from his back. It was almost completely covered with little red and blue and ivory and saffron squares; from them he made out the lineaments of the face— a mouth, the beginning of heavy brows, a straight nose, but the face was empty; the eyes had not yet been put in. The impression for the moment was almost as if the artist had tricked him and done the Physician's Friend.

"It don't have eyes," Parker cried out.

"That'll come," the artist said, "in due time. We have another day to go on it yet."

Parker spent die night on a cot at die Haven of Light Christian Mission. He found these die best places to stay in die city because diey were free and included a meal of sorts. He got die last available cot and because he was sail barefooted, he accepted a pair of secondhand shoes which, in his confusion, he put on to go to bed; he was still shocked from all that had happened to him. All night he lay awake in the long dormitory of cots with lumpy figures on them. The only light was from a phosphorescent cross glowing at die end of die room. The tree reached out to grasp him again, then burst into flame; die shoe burned quiedy by itself; the eyes in die book said to him distinctly GO BACK and at the same **time** did riot utter a sound. He wished that he were not in this city, not in diis Haven of Light Mission, not in a bed by himself. He longed miserably for Sarah Ruth. Her sharp tongue and icepick eyes were die only comfort he could bring to mind. He decided he was losing it. Her eyes appeared soft and dilatory compared with die eyes in die book, for even diough he could not summon up die exact look of diose eyes, he could sull feel dieir penetradon. He felt as though, under their gaze, he was as transparent as die wing of a fly.

The tattooist had told him not to come until ten in die morning, but when he arrived at that hour, Parker- was sitting in the dark hallway on the floor, waiting for him. He had decided upon getdng up that, once the tattoo was on him, he would not look at it, diat all his sensations of die day and night before were those of a crazy man and that he would return to doing things according to his own sound judgement.

The artist began where he left off. "One diing I want to know," he said presently as he worked over Parker's back, "why do you want diis on you? Have you gone and got religion? Are you saved?" he asked in a mocking voice.

Parker's throat felt salty and dry. "Naw," he said, "I ain't got no use for none of that. A man can't save his self from whatever it is he don't deserve none of my sympathy." These words seemed to leave his mouth like wraiths and to evaporate at once as if he had never uttered them.

"Then why . . ."

"I married this woman that's saved," Parker said. "I never should have done it. I ought to leave her. She's done gone and got pregnant." "That's too bad," die artist said. "Then it's her making you have this tattoo."

"Naw," Parker said, "she don't know nothing about it. It's a surprise for her." "You think she'll like it and lay off you a while?" "She can't hep herself," Parker said. "She can't say she don't like

the looks of God." He decided he had told die artist enough of his business. Artists were all right in their place but he didn't like tJiem poking their noses into the affairs of regular people. "I didn't get no sleep last night," he said. "I diink I'll get some now."

That closed the mouth of die artist but it did not bring him any sleep. He lay there, imagining how Sarah Ruth would be struck speechless by the face on his back and every now and then this would be interrupted by a vision of the tree of fire and his empty shoe burning beneath it.

The artist worked steadily until nearly four o'clock, not stopping to have lunch, hardly pausing with the electric instrument except to wipe the dripping dye off Parker's back as he went along. Finally he finished. "You can get up and look at it now," he said.

Parker sat up but he remained on the edge of the table.

The artist was pleased with his work and wanted Parker to look at it at once. Instead Parker continued to sit on the edge of the table, bent forward slightly but with a vacant look. "What ails you?" the artist said. "Go look at it."

"Ain't nothing ail me," Parker said in a sudden belligerent voice. "That tattoo ain't going nowhere. It'll be there when I get there." He reached for his shirt and began gingerly to put it on.

The artist took him roughly by the arm and propelled him between the two mirrors. "Now *loo\"* he said, angry at having his work ignored.

Parker looked, turned white and moved away. The eyes in the reflected face continued to look at him—still, straight, all-demanding, enclosed in silence. "It was your idea, remember," the artist said. "I would have advised something else." Parker said nothing. He put on his shirt and went out the door while the artist shouted, "I'll expect all of my money I"

Parker headed toward a package shop on the corner. He bought a pint of whiskey and took it into a nearby alley and drank it all in five minutes. Then he moved on to a pool hall nearby which he frequented when he came to die city. It was a well-lighted barnlike place with a bar up one side and gambling machines on die other and pool tables in the back. As soon as Parker entered, a large man in a red and black checkered shirt hailed him by slapping him on the back and yelling, "Yeyyyyyy boy I O. E. Parker I"

Parker was not yet ready to be struck on the back. "Lay off," he said, "I got a fresh tattoo there." "What you got diis time?" die man asked and dien yelled to a few at die machines. "O.E.'s got him another tattoo." "Nothing special this time," Parker said and slunk over to a machine that was not being used.

"Come on," the big man said, "let's have a look at O.E.'s tattoo," and while Parker squirmed in dieir hands, they pulled up his shirt. Parker felt all die hands drop away instantly and his shirt fell again like a veil over die face. There was a silence in die pool room which seemed to Parker to grow from die circle around him until it extended to die foundations under the building and upward dirough die beams in the roof.

Finally some one said, "Christ!" Then they all broke into noise at once. Parker turned around, an uncertain grin on his face. "Leave it to O.E.!" the man in die checkered shirt said. "That boy's

a real card I"

"Maybe he's gone and got religion," some one yelled.

"Not on your life," Parker said.

"O.E.'s got religion and is witnessing for Jesus, ain't you, O.E.?" a litde man with a piece of cigar in his moudi said wryry. "An o-riginal way to do it if I ever saw one."

"Leave it to Parker to diink of a new one I" die fat man said.

"Yyeeeeeeyyyyyyy boy I" someone yelled and they all began to whistle and curse in compliment until Parker said, "Aaa shut up."

"What'd you do it for?" somebody asked.

"For laughs," Parker said. "What's it to you?"

"Why ain't you laughing then?" somebody yelled. Parker lunged into the midst of them and like a whirlwind on a summer's day there began a fight that raged amid overturned tables and swinging fists until two of them grabbed him and ran to the door with him and threw him out. Then a calm descended on the pool hall as nerve shattering as if the long barnlike room were the ship from which Jonah had been cast into the sea.

Parker sat for a long time on the ground in the alley behind the pool hall,

examining his soul. He saw it as a spider web of facts and lies that was not at all important to him but which appeared to be necessary in spite of his opinion. The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed. He was as certain of it as he had ever been of anything. Throughout his life, grumbling and sometimes cursing, often afraid, once in rapture, Parker had obeyed whatever instinct of this kind had come to him—in rapture when his spirit had lifted at die sight of the tattooed man at die fair, afraid when he had joined die navy, grumbling when he had married Sarah Ruth.

The diought of her brought him slowly to his feet. She would know what he had to do. She would clear up the rest of it, and she would at least be pleased. It seemed to him that, all along, that was what he wanted, to please her. His truck was still parked in front of die building where die artist had his place, but it was not far away. He got in it and drove out of die city and into die country night. His head was almost clear of liquor and he observed that his dissatisfaction was gone, but he felt not quite like himself. It was as if he were himself but a stranger to himself, driving into a new country diough everything he saw was familiar to him, even at night.

He arrived finally at die house on the embankment, pulled die truck under die pecan tree and got out. He made as much noise as possible to assert diat he was still in charge here, that his leaving her for a night widiout word meant nodiing except it was die way
he did diings. He slammed the car door, stamped up the two steps and across the porch and rattled the door knob. It did not respond to his touch. "Sarah Ruth I" he yelled, "let me in."

There was no lock on the door and she had evidently placed die back of a chair against die knob. He began to beat on die door and rattle die knob at die same time.

He heard the bed springs screak and bent down and put his head to die keyhole, but it was stopped up widi paper. "Let me inl" he hollered, bamming on die door again. "What you got me locked out for?"

A sharp voice close to the door said, "Who's diere?"

"Me," Parker said, "O.E."

He waited a moment.

"Me," he said impatiently, "O.E."

Still no sound from inside.

He tried once more. "O.E.," he said, bamming die door two or
three more times. "O. E. Parker. You know me." There was a silence. Then die voice said slowly, "I don't know no O.E." "Quit fooling," Parker pleaded. "You ain't got any business doing me diis way. It's me, old O.E., I'm back. You ain't

afraid of me."

"Who's diere?" die same unfeeling voice said.

Parker turned his head as if he expected someone behind him to give him the answer. The sky had lightened slightly and diere were two or diree streaks of yellow floating above the horizon. Then as he stood diere, a tree of light burst over die skyline.

Parker fell back against die door as if he had been pinned diere by a lance.

"Who's diere?" die voice from inside said and diere was a quality about it now diat seemed final. The knob rattled and die voice said peremptorily, "Who's diere, I ast you?"

Parker bent down and put his mouth near die stuffed keyhole.

"Obadiah," he whispered and all at once he felt die light pouring dirough him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors, a garden of trees and birds and beasts.

"Obadiah Elihuel" he whispered.

The door opened and he stumbled in. Sarah Rudi loomed diere, hands on her hips. She began at once, "That was no hefty blonde woman you was working for and you'il have to pay her every penny on her tractor you busted up. She don't keep insurance on it. She came here and her and me had us a long talk and I . . ."

Trembling, Parker set about lighting the kerosene lamp. "What's the matter with you, wasting that kerosene this near daylight?" she demanded. "I ain't got to look at you." A yellow glow enveloped diem. Parker put die match down and began to unbutton his shirt. "And you ain't going to have none of me this near morning," she said.

"Shut your mouth," he said quietly. "Look at diis and then I don't want to hear no more out of you." He removed die shirt and turned his back to her.

"Another picture," Sarah Ruth growled. "I might have known you was off after putting some more trash on yourself." Parker's knees went hollow under him. He wheeled around and cried, "Look at itl Don't just say thatl *Loo* at it!" "I done looked," she said. "Don't you know who it is?" he cried in anguish. "No, who is it?" Sarah Ruth said. "It ain't anybody I know." "It's him," Parker said. "Him who?" "Godl" Parker cried. "God? God don't look like that!" "What do you know how he looks?" Parker moaned. "You ain't seen him." "He don't *loo\,"* Sarah Ruth said. "He's a spirit. No man shall see his face." "Aw listen," Parker groaned, "this is just a picture of him."

"Idolatry!" Sarah Ruth screamed. "Idolatry! Enflaming yourself, widi idols under every green tree! I can put up widi lies and vanity but I don't want no idolator in this house!" and she grabbed up the broom and began to dirash him across die shoulders widi it.

Parker was too stunned to resist. He sat diere and let her beat him until she had nearly knocked him senseless and large welts had formed on the face of the tattooed Christ. Then he staggered up and made for the door.

She stamped the broom two or diree times on the floor and went to the window and shook it out to get the taint of him off it. Still gripping it, she looked toward the pecan tree and her eyes hardened still more. There he was—who called himself Obadiah Elihue— leaning against die tree, crying like a baby.

Judgement Day

TANNER was conserving all his strength for the trip home. He meant to walk as far as he could get and trust to the Almighty to get him the rest of die way. That morning and the morning before, he had allowed his daughter to dress him and had conserved tiiat much more energy. Now he sat in the chair by the window—his blue shirt buttoned at die collar, his coat on die back of the chair, and his hat on his head—waiting for her to leave. He couldn't escape until she got out of die way. The window looked out on a brick wall and down into an alley full of New York air, die kind fit for cats and garbage. A few snow flakes drifted past die window but diey were too diin and scattered for his failing vision. The daughter was in the kitchen washing dishes. She dawdled over everytliing, talking to herself. When he had first come, he had answered her, but diat had not been wanted. She glowered at him as if, old fool diat he was, he should still have had sense enough not to answer a woman talking to herself. She questioned herself in one voice and answered herself in anotiier. Witii die energy he had conserved yesterday letting her dress him, he had written a note and pinned it in his pocket, IF FOUND DEAD SHIP EXPRESS COLLECT TO COLEMAN PARRUM, CORINTH, GEORGIA. Under diis he had continued: **COLEMAN SELL MY BELONGINGS AND PAY THE FREIGHT ON ME & THE UNDERTAKER. ANYTHING LEFT OVER YOU CAN KEEP. YOURS TRULY T. C TANNER. P.S. STAY WHERE YOU ARE. DON'T LET THEM TALK YOU INTO** COMING UP HERE, ITS NO KIND OF PLACE. It had taken him die better part of tiiirty minutes to write die paper; die script was wavery but decipherable widi patience. He controlled one hand by holding die odier on top of it. By die time he had got it written, she was back in die apartment from getting her groceries. Today he was ready. All he had to do was push one foot in front

of die odier until he got to the door and down the steps. Once down the steps, he would get out of the neighborhood. Once out of it, he would hail a taxi cab and go to the freight yards. Some bum would help him onto a car. Once he got in the freight car, he would lie down and rest. During the night the train would start South, and the next day or the morning after, dead or alive, he would be home. Dead or alive. It was being there that mattered; the dead or alive did not.

If he had had good sense he would have gone the day after he arrived; better sense and he would not have arrived. He had not got desperate until two days ago when he had heard his daughter and son-in-law taking leave of each other after breakfast. They were standing in the front door, she seeing him off for a three-day trip. He drove a long distance moving van. She must have handed him his leather headgear. "You ought to get you a hat," she said, "a real one."

"And sit all day in it," the son-in-law said, "like him in there. Yah! All he does is sit all day with that hat on. Sits all day with that damn black hat on his head. Inside!"

"Well you don't even have you a hat," she said. "Nothing but that leather cap with flaps. People tliat are somebody wear hats. Other kinds wear those leather caps like you got on."

"People that are somebody!" he cried. "People that are somebody! That kills me! That really kills me!" The son-in-law had a stupid muscular face and a yankee voice to go with it.

"My daddy is here to stay," his daughter said. "He ain't going to last long. He was somebody when he was somebody. He never worked for nobody in his life but himself and had people—other people—working for him."

"Yah? Niggers is what he had working for him," the son-in-law said. "That's all. I've worked a nigger or two myself."

"Those were just nawthun niggers you worked," she said, her voice suddenly going lower so that Tanner had to lean forward to catch the words. "It takes brains to work a real nigger. You got to know how to handle them."

"Yah so I don't have brains," the son-in-law said.

One of the sudden, very occasional, feelings of warmth for the daughter came over Tanner. Every now and then she said something that might make you think she had a little sense stored away somewhere for safe keeping.

"You got them," she said. "You don't always use them." "He has a stroke when he sees a nigger in the building," the son-in-law said, "and she tells me . . ." "Shut up talking so loud," she said. "That's not why he had the stroke." There was a silence. "Where you going to bury him?" the sonin-law asked, taking a different tack.

"Bury who?"

"Him in there."

"Right here in New York," she said. "Where do you think? We got a lot. I'm not taking that trip down there again with nobody."

"Yah. Well I just wanted to make sure," he said.

When she returned to the room, Tanner had both hands gripped on the chair arms. His eyes were trained on her like the eyes of an angry corpse. "You promised you'd bury me tliere," he said. "Your promise ain't any good. Your promise ain't any good. Your promise ain't any good." His voice was so dry it was barely audible. He began to shake, his hands, his head, his feet. "Bury me here and burn in hell!" he cried and fell back into his chair.

The daughter shuddered to attention. "You ain't dead yet!" She threw out a

ponderous sigh. "You got a long time to be worrying about diat." She turned and began to pick up parts of the newspaper scattered on the floor. She had gray hair that hung to her shoulders and a round face, beginning to wear. "I do every last living thing for you," she muttered, "and this is the way you carry on." She stuck the papers under her arm and said, "And don't throw hell at me. I don't believe in it. That's a lot of hardshell Baptist hooey." Then she went into the kitchen.

He kept his mouth stretched taut, his top plate gripped between his tongue and the roof of his mouth. Still the tears flooded down his cheeks; he wiped each one furtively on his shoulder.

Her voice rose from the kitchen. "As bad as having a child. He wanted to come and now he's here, he don't like it." He had not wanted to come.

"Pretended he didn't but I could tell. I said if you don't want to come I can't make you. If you don't want to live like decent people tiiere's nothing I can do about it."

"As for me," her higher voice said, "when I die that ain't the time I'm going to start getting choosey. They can lay me in the nearest spot. When I pass from this world I'll be considerate of them that stay in it. I won't be thinking of just myself."

"Certainly not," the other voice said, "You never been that selfish. You're the kind that looks out for other people."

"Well I try," she said, "I try."

He laid his head on the back of the chair for a moment and the hat tilted down over his eyes. He had raised diree boys and her. The three boys were gone, two in the war and one to the devil and there was nobody left who felt a duty toward him but her, married and childless, in New York City like Mrs. Big and ready when she came back and found him living the way he was to take him back with her. She had put her face in the door of the shack and had stared, expressionless, for a second. Then all at once she had screamed and jumped back.

"What's that on the floor?"

"Coleman," he said.

The old Negro was curled up on a pallet asleep at the foot of Tanner's bed, a stinking skin full of bones, arranged in what seemed vaguely human form. When Coleman was young, he had looked like a bear; now that he was old he looked like a monkey. With Tanner it was the opposite; when .he was young he had looked like a monkey but when he got old, he looked like a bear.

The daughter stepped back onto the porch. There were the bot toms of two cane chairs tilted against the clapboard but she declined to take a seat. She stepped out about ten feet from the house as if

it took diat much space to clear the odor. Then she had spoken her piece.

"If you don't have any pride I have and I know my duty and I was raised to do it. My mother raised me to do it if you didn't. She was from plain people but not die kind that likes to settle in with niggers."

At that point the old Negro roused up and slid out the door, a doubled-up shadow which Tanner just caught sight of gliding away.

She had shamed him. He shouted so they both could hear. "Who you think cooks? Who you think cuts my firewood and empties my slops? He's paroled to me. That no-good scoundrel has been on my hands for thirty years. He ain't a bad nigger."

She was unimpressed. "Whose shack is this anyway?" she had asked. "Yours or his?" "Him and me built it," he said. "You go on back up there. I wouldn't come with you for no million dollars or no sack of salt."

"It looks like him and you built it. Whose land is it on?"

"Some people that live in Florida," he said evasively. He had known then diat it was land up for sale but he thought it was too sorry for anyone to buy. That same afternoon he had found out different. He had found out in time to go back with her. If he had found out a day later, he might still be there, squatting on the doctor's land.

When he saw the brown porpoise-shaped figure striding across the field that afternoon, he had known at once what had happened; no one had to tell him. If that nigger had owned the whole world except for one runty rutted peafield and he acquired it, he would walk across it diat way, beating the weeds aside, his thick neck swelled, his stomach a throne for his gold watch and chain. Doctor Foley. He was only part black. The rest was Indian and white.

He was everything to the niggers—druggist and undertaker and general counsel and real estate man and sometimes he got the evil eye off them and sometimes he put it on. Be prepared, he said to himself, watching him approach, to take something off him, nigger though he be. Be prepared, because you ain't got a thing to hold up to him but die skin you come in, and that's no more use to you now than what a snake would shed. You don't have a chance with the government against you.

He was sitting on die porch in die piece of straight chair tilted against die shack. "Good evening, Foley," he said and nodded as die doctor came up and stopped short at die edge of the clearing, as if he had only just diat minute seen him diough it was plain he had sighted him as he crossed the field.

"I be out here to look at my property," the doctor said. "Good evening." His voice was quick and high.

Ain't been your property long, he said to himself. "I seen you coming," he said.

"I acquired this here recently," the doctor said and proceeded without looking at him again to walk around to one side of die shack. In a moment he came back and stopped in front of him. Then he stepped boldly to the door of the shack and put his head in. Coleman was in there that time too, asleep. He looked for a moment and then turned aside. "I know that nigger," he said. "Coleman Parrum—how long does it take him to sleep off that stump liquor you all make?"

Tanner took hold of the knobs on the chair bottom and held them hard. "This shack ain't in your property. Only on it, by my mistake," he said.

The doctor removed his cigar momentarily from his mouth. "It ain't my mis-take," he said and smiled.

He had only sat there, looking ahead.

"It don't pay to make this kind of mis-take," the doctor said.

"I never found nothing that paid yet," he muttered.

"Everything pays," the Negro said, "if you knows how to make it," and he remained there smiling, looking the squatter up and down. Then he turned and went around the other side of the shack. There was a silence. He was looking for the still.

Then would have been the time to kill him. There was a gun inside the shack and he could have done it as easy as not, but, from childhood, he had been weakened for that kind of violence by the fear of hell. He had never killed one, he had always handled diem with his wits and with luck. He was known to have a way with niggers. There was an art to handling them. The secret of handling a nigger was to show him his brains didn't have a chance against yours; then he would jump on your back and know he had a good tiling there for life. He had had Coleman on his back for thirty years.

Tanner had first seen Coleman when he was working six of diem at a saw mill in the middle of a pine forest fifteen miles from nowhere. They were as sorry a crew as he had worked, the kind that on Monday they didn't show up. What was in the air had reached them. They thought there was a new Lincoln elected who was going to abolish work. He managed them with a very sharp penknife. He had had something wrong with his kidney then that made his hands shake and he had taken to whittling to force that waste motion out of sight. He did not intend them to see that his hands shook of their own accord and he did not intend to see it himself or to

countenance it. The knife had moved constantly, violently, in his quaking hands and here and there small crude figures—that he never looked at again and could not have said what they were if he had—dropped to the ground. The Negroes picked them up and took them home; there was not much time between them and darkest Africa. The knife glittered constantly in his hands. More than once he had stopped short and said in an off-hand voice to some half-reclining, head-averted Negro, "Nigger, this knife is in my hand now but if you don't quit wasting my time and money, it'll be in your gut shortly." And the Negro would begin to rise—slowly, but he would be in the act—before the sentence was completed.

A large black loose-jointed Negro, twice his own size, had begun hanging around the edge of the saw mill, watching the others work and when he was not watching, sleeping, in full view of them, sprawled like a gigantic bear on his back. "Who is that?" he had asked. "If he wants to work, tell him to come here. If he don't, tell him to go. No idlers are going to hang around here."

None of them knew who he was. They knew he didn't want to work. They knew nothing else, not where he had come from, nor why, though he was probably brother to one, cousin to all of them. He had ignored him for a day; against the six of them he was one yellow-faced scrawny white man with shaky hands. He was willing to wait for trouble, but not forever. The next day the stranger came again. After the six Tanner worked had seen the idler there for half the morning, they quit and began to eat, a full thirty minutes before noon. He had not risked ordering them up. He had gone to the source of the trouble.

The stranger was leaning against a tree on the edge of the clearing, watching with half-closed eyes. The insolence on his face barely covered die wariness behind it. His look said, this ain't much of a white man so why he come on so big, what he fixing to do ?

He had meant to say, "Nigger, this knife is in my hand now but if you ain't out of my sight . . ." but as he drew closer he changed his mind. The Negro's eyes were small and bloodshot. Tanner supposed tliere was a knife on him somewhere that he would as soon use as not. His own penknife moved, directed solely by some intruding intelligence diat worked in his hands. He had no idea what he was carving, but when he reached die Negro, he had already made two holes the size of half dollars in the piece of bark.

The Negro's gaze fell on his hands and was held. His jaw slackened. His eyes did not move from die knife tearing recklessly around the bark. He watched as if he saw an invisible power working on the wood.

He looked himself then and, astonished, saw the connected rims of a pair of spectacles.

He held them away from him and looked through the holes past a pile of shavings and on into the woods to die edge of die pen where they kept their mules.

"You can't see so good, can you, boy?" he said and began scraping die ground with his foot to turn up a piece of wire. He picked up a small piece of haywire; in a minute he found another, shorter piece and picked that up. He began to attach these to the bark. He was in no hurry now that he knew what he was doing. When die spectacles were finished, he handed diem to the Negro. "Put diese on," he said. "I hate to see anybody can't see good."

There was an instant when the Negro might have done one diing or anodier, might have taken the glasses and crushed diem in his hand or grabbed the knife and turned it on him. He saw the exact instant in the muddy liquor-swollen eyes when the pleasure of having a knife in diis white man's gut was balanced against something else, he could not tell what.

The Negro reached for the glasses. He attached the bows carefully behind his ears and looked forth. He peered this way and that widi exaggerated solemnity. And then he looked directly at Tanner and grinned, or grimaced, Tanner could not tell which, but he had an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been dieir common lot. The vision failed him before he could decipher it.

"Preacher," he said, "what you hanging around here for?" He picked up anodier piece of bark and began, witJiout looking at it, to carve again. "This ain't Sunday."

"This here ain't Sunday?" die Negro said.

"This is Friday," he said. "That's the way it is with you preachers —drunk all week so you don't know when Sunday is. What you see through those glasses?"

"See a man."

"What kind of a man?"

"See the man make theseyer glasses."

"Is he white or black?"

"He white 1" the Negro said as if only at mat moment was his vision sufficiently improved to detect it. "Yessuh, he white!" he said. "Well, you treat him like he was white," Tanner said. "What's your name?"

"Name Coleman," the Negro said.

And he had not got rid of Coleman since. You make a monkey out of one of diem and he jumps on your back and stays tliere for life, but let one make a

monkey out of you and all you can do is kill him or disappear. And he was not going to hell for killing a nigger. Behind the shack he heard the doctor kick over a bucket. He sat and waited.

In a moment the doctor appeared again, beating his way around the otlier side of the house, whacking at scattered clumps of Johnson grass with his cane. He stopped in die middle of die yard,
"about where that morning the daughter had delivered her ultimatum.

"You don't belong here," he began. "I could have you prosecuted."

Tanner remained there, dumb, staring across die field.

"Where's your still?" the doctor asked.

"If it's a still around here, it don't belong to me," he said and shut his mouth tight.

The Negro laughed softly. "Down on your luck, ain't you?" he murmured. "Didn't you used to own a little piece of land over acrost the river and lost it?"

He had continued to study die woods ahead.

"If you want to run the still for me, that's one thing," the doctor said. "If you don't, you might as well had be packing up." "I don't have to work for you," he said. "The governmint ain't got around yet to forcing die white folks to work for the colored."

The doctor polished the stone in his ring with the ball of his thumb. "I don't like the governmint no bettern you," he said. "Where you going instead? You going to the city and get you a soot of rooms at the Biltmo' Hotel?"

Tanner said nothing.

"The day coming," the doctor said, "when die white folks IS going to be working for the colored and you mights well to git ahead of the crowd."

"That day ain't coming for me," Tanner said shortly. "Done come for you," die doctor said. "Ain't come for die rest of them."

Tanner's gaze drove on past the farthest blue edge of the tree line into the pale empty afternoon sky. "I got a daughter in the north," he said. "I don't have to work for you."

The doctor took his watch from his watch pocket and looked at it and put it back. He gazed for a moment at the back of his hands. He appeared to have measured and to know secretly the time it would take everydiing to change finally upside down. "She don't want no old daddy like you," he said. "Maybe she say she do, but that ain't likely. Even if you rich," he said, "diey don't want you. They got they own ideas. The black ones diey rares and they pitches. I made mine," he said, "and I ain't done none of diat." He looked again at Tanner.

"I be back here next week," he said, "and if you still here, I know you going to work for me." He remained there a moment, rocking on his heels, waiting for some answer. Finally he turned and started beating his way back dirough the overgrown padi.

Tanner had continued to look across the field as if his spirit had been sucked out of him into the woods and nothing was left on the chair but a shell. If he had known it was a question of this— sitting here looking out of diis window all day in this no-place, or just running a still for a nigger, he would have run die still for die nigger. He would have been a nigger's white nigger any day. Behind him he heard the daughter come in from the kitchen. His heart accelerated but after a second he heard her plump herself down on the sofa. She was not yet ready to go. He did not turn and look at her.

She sat diere silently a few moments. Then she began. "The trouble with you is," she said, "you sit in front of that window *4B?* the time where there's nothing to look out at. You need some inspiration and an out-let. If you would let me pull your chair around to look at the TV, you would quit thinking about morbid stuff, death and hell and judgement. My Lord."

"The Judgement is coming," he muttered. "The sheep'U be separated from the goats. Them that kept their promises from them that didn't. Them that did the best they could with what they had from them that didn't. Them that honored their father and their mother from them that cursed them. Them that . . ."

She heaved a mammoth sigh that all but drowned him out. "What's the use in me wasting my good breath?" she asked. She rose and went back in the kitchen and began knocking things about.

She was so high and mighty I At home he had been living in a shack but there was at least air around it. He could put his feet on the ground. Here she didn't even live in a house. She lived in a pigeon-hutch of a building, with all stripes of foreigner, all of them twisted in the tongue. It was no place for a sane man. The first morning here she had taken him sightseeing and he had seen in fifteen minutes exactly how it was. He had not been out of the apartment since. He never wanted to set foot again on the underground railroad or the steps that moved under you while you stood still or any elevator to the thirty-fourth floor. When he was safely back in the apartment again, he had imagined going over it widi Coleman. He had to turn his head every few seconds to make sure Coleman was behind him. Keep to the inside or these people'll knock you down, keep right behind me or you'll get left, keep your hat on, you damn idiot, he had said, and Coleman had come on with his bent running shamble, panting and muttering, What we doing here? Where you get this fool idea coming here?

I come to show you it was no kind of place. Now you know you

were well off where you were.

I knowed it before, Coleman said. Was you didn't know it.

When he had been here a week, he had got a postcard from Coleman diat had been written for him by Hooten at the railroad station. It was written in green ink and said, "This is Coleman—X —howyou boss." Under it Hooten had written from himself, "Quit frequenting all those nitespots and come on home, you scoundrel, yours truly. W. P. Hooten." He had sent Coleman a card in return, care of Hooten, diat said, "This place is alrite if you like it. Yours truly, W. T. Tanner." Since the daughter had to mail the card, he had not put on it that he was returning as soon as his pension check came. He had not intended to tell her but to leave her a note. When the check came, he would hire himself a taxi to the bus station and be on his way. And it would have made her as happy as it made him. She had found his company dour and her duty irksome. If he had sneaked out, she would have had the pleasure of having tried to do it and to top diat off, the pleasure of his ingratitude.

As for him, he would have returned to squat on die doctor's land and to take his orders from a nigger who chewed ten-cent cigars. And to diink less about it dian formerly. Instead he had been done in by a nigger actor, or one who called himself an actor. He didn't believe die nigger was any actor.

There were two apartments on each floor of die building. He had been widi die daughter diree weeks when die people in die next hutch moved out. He had stood in die hall and watched die moving^ out and die next day he had watched a moving-in. The hall was narrow and dark and he stood in die corner out of the way, offering only a suggesdon every now and dien to the movers that would have made their work easier for them if they had paid any attention. The furniture was new and cheap so he decided the people moving in might be a newly married couple and he would just wait around undl diey came and wish them well. After a while a large Negro in a light blue suit came lunging up the stairs, carrying two canvas suitcases, his head lowered against die strain. Behind him stepped a young tan-skinned woman widi bright copper-colored hair. The Negro dropped die suitcases widi a thud in front of die door of die next apartment.

"Be careful, Sweetie," the woman said. "My make-up is in diere."

It broke upon him then just what was happening.

The Negro was grinning. He took a swipe at one of her hips.

"Quit it," she said, "there's an old guy watching."

They both turned and looked at him.

"Had-do," he said and nodded. Then he turned quickly into his own door.

His daughter was in the kitchen. "Who you think's rented that apartment over

there?" he asked, his face alight.

She looked at him suspiciously. "Who?" she muttered.

"A nigger I" he said in a gleeful voice. "A South Alabama nigger if I ever saw one. And got him this high-yeller, high-stepping woman with red hair and they two are going to live next door to you I" He slapped his knee. "Yes sireel" he said. "Damn if they ain't I" It was the first time since coming up here that he had had occasion to laugh.

Her face squared up instantly. "All right now you listen to me," she said. "You keep away from them. Don't you go over there trying to get friendly widi him. They ain't die same around here and I don't want any trouble with niggers, you hear me? If you have to live next to them, just you mind your business and they'll mind theirs. That's the way people were meant to get along in this world. Everybody can get along if they just mind their business. Live and let live." She began to wrinkle her nose like a rabbit, a stupid way she had. "Up here everybody minds their own business and everybody gets along. That's all you have to do."

"I was getting along with niggers before you were born," he said. He went back out into die hall and waited. He was willing to bet die nigger would like to talk to someone who understood him. Twice while he waited, he forgot and in his excitement, spit his tobacco juice against the baseboard. In about twenty minutes, the door of the apartment opened again and the Negro came out. He had put on a tie and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles and Tanner noticed for the first time that he had a small almost invisible goatee. A real swell. He came on without appearing to see there was anyone else in the hall.

"Haddy, John," Tanner said and nodded, but die Negro brushed past widiout hearing and went rattling rapidly down the stairs.

Could be deaf and dumb, Tanner thought. He went back into the apartment and sat down but each time he heard a noise in the hall, he got up and went to die door and stuck his head out to see if it might be the Negro. Once in the middle of the afternoon, he caught the Negro's eye just as he was rounding the bend of the stairs again but before he could get out a word, the man was in his own apartment and had slammed the door. He had never known one to move that fast unless the police were after him.

He was standing in the hall early the next morning when the woman came out of her door alone, walking on high gold-painted heels. He wished to bid her good morning or simply to nod but instinct told him to beware. She didn't look like any kind of woman, black or white, he had ever seen before and he remained pressed against die wall, frightened more than anything else, and feigning invisibility.

The woman gave him a flat stare, tiien turned her head away and stepped wide of him as if she were skirting an open garbage can. He held his breath until she was out of sight. Then he waited patiently for tlie man.

The Negro came out about eight o'clock.

This time Tanner advanced squarely in his path. "Good morning, Preacher," he said. It had been his experience that if a Negro tended to be sullen, diis title usually cleared up his expression.

The Negro stopped abruptly.

"I seen you move in," Tanner said. "I ain't been up here long myself. It ain't much of a place if you ask me. I reckon you wish you were back in South Alabama."

The Negro did not take a step or answer. His eyes began to move. They moved from the top of the black hat, down to tlie collarless blue shirt, neatly buttoned at the neck, down the faded galluses to the gray trousers and the high-top shoes and up again, very slowly, while some unfathomable dead-cold rage seemed to stiffen and shrink him.

"I thought you might know somewhere around here we could find us a pond, Preacher," Tanner said in a voice growing diinner but still witJi considerable hope in it.

A seething noise came out of the Negro before he spoke. "I'm not from Soudi Alabama," he said in a breathless wheezing voice. "I'm from New York City. And I'm not no preacher! I'm an actor."

Tanner chortled. "It's a little actor in most preachers, ain't it?" he said and winked. "I reckon you just preach on the side."

"I don't preach I" tlie Negro cried and rushed past him as if a swarm of bees had suddenly come down on him out of nowhere. He dashed down the stairs and was gone.

Tanner stood here for some time before he went back in the apartment. The rest of the day he sat in his chair and debated whether he would have one more try at making friends with him. Every time he heard a noise on the stairs he went to the door and looked out, but the Negro did not return until late in the afternoon. Tanner was standing in tlie hall waiting for him when he reached the top of the stairs. "Good evening, preacher," he said, forgetting that the Negro called himself an actor.

The Negro stopped and gripped the banister rail. A tremor racked him from his head to his crotch. Then he began to come forward slowly. When he was close enough he lunged and grasped Tanner by both shoulders. "I don't take no crap," he whispered, "off no wool-hat red-neck son-of-a-bitch peckerwood old bastard like you." He caught his breath. And then his voice came out in tlie

sound of an exasperation so profound that it rocked on the verge of a laugh. It was high and piercing and weak, "And I'm not no preacher I I'm not even no Christian. I don't believe that crap. There ain't no Jesus and there ain't no God."

The old man felt his heart inside him hard and tough as an oak knot. "And you ain't black," he said. "And I ain't white I"

The Negro slammed him against the wall. He yanked the black hat down over his eyes. Then he grabbed his shirt front and shoved him backwards to his open door and knocked him through it. From the kitchen the daughter saw him blindly hit the edge of the inside hall door and fall reeling into the living room.

For days his tongue appeared to be frozen in his mouth. When it unthawed it was twice its normal size and he could not make her understand him. What he wanted to know was if the government check had come because he meant to buy a bus ticket with it and go home. After a few days, he made her understand. "It came," she said, "and it'll just pay the first two weeks' doctor-bill and please tell me how you're going home when you can't talk or walk or dunk straight and you got one eye crossed yet? Just please tell me that?"

It had come to him then slowly just what his present situation was. At least he would have to make her understand that he must be sent home to be buried. They could have him shipped back in a refrigerated car so diat he would keep for the trip. He didn't want any undertaker up here messing with him. Let them get him off at once and he would come in on die early morning train and diey could wire Hooten to get Coleman and Coleman would do the rest; she would not even have to go herself. After a lot of argument, he wrung tlie promise from her. She would ship him back.

After that he slept peacefully and improved a little. In his dreams he could feel tiie cold early morning air of home coming in through the cracks of die pine box. He could see Coleman waking, red-eyed, on the station platform and Hooten standing there with his green eyeshade and black alpaca sleeves. If die old fool had stayed at home where he belonged, Hooten would be thinking, he wouldn't be arriving on die 6:03 in no box. Coleman had turned die borrowed mule and cart so diat diey could slide the box off die platform onto the open end of the wagon. Everydiing was ready and the two of them, shut-moudied, inched the loaded coffin toward the wagon. From inside he began to scratch on die wood. They let go as if it had caught fire.

They stood looking at each odier, then at die box.

"That him," Coleman said. "He in there his self."

"Naw," Hooten said, "must be a rat got in there with him."

"That him. This here one of his tricks."

"If it's a rat he might as well stay."

"That him. Git a crowbar."

Hooten went grumbling off and got die crowbar and came back and began to pry open die lid. Even before he had die upper end pried open, Coleman was jumping up and down, wheezing and panting from excitement. Tanner gave a dirust upward widi bodi hands and sprang up in die box. "Judgement Day I Judgement Day I" he cried. "Don't you two fools know it's Judgement Day?"

Now he knew exactly what her promises were worth. He would do as well to trust to the note pinned in his coat and to any stranger who found him dead in the street or in the boxcar or wherever. There was nothing to be looked for from her except that she would do things her way. She came out of the kitchen again, holding her hat and coat and rubber boots.

"Now listen," she said, "I have to go to the store. Don't you try to get up and walk around while I'm gone. You've been to the bathroom and you shouldn't have to go again. I don't want to find you on the floor when I get back."

You won't find me atall when you get back, he said to himself. This was the last time he would see her flat dumb face. He felt guilty. She had been good to him and he had been nothing but a nuisance to her.

"Do you want you a glass of milk before I go?" she asked.

"No," he said. Then he drew breath and said, "You got a nice place here. It's a nice part of the country. I'm sorry if I've give you a lot of trouble getting sick. It was my fault trying to be friendly with that nigger." And I'm a damned liar besides, he said to himself to kill the outrageous taste such a statement made in his mouth.

For a moment she stared as if he were losing his mind. Then she seemed to think better of it. "Now don't saying something pleasant like that once in a while make you feel better?" she asked and sat down on the sofa.

His knees itched to unbend. Git on, git on, he fumed silently. Make haste and go.

"It's great to have you here," she said. "I wouldn't have you any other place. My own daddy." She gave him a big smile and hoisted her right leg up and began to pull on her boot. "I wouldn't wish a dog out on a day like this," she said, "but I got to go. You can sit here and hope I don't slip and break my neck." She stamped the booted foot on the floor and then began to tackle the other one.

He turned his eyes to the window. The snow was beginning to stick and freeze to the outside pane. When he looked at her again, she was standing there like a big doll stuffed into its hat and coat. She drew on a pair of green knitted gloves. "Okay," she said, "I'm gone. You sure you don't want anything?"

"No," he said, "go ahead on."

"Well so long then," she said.

He raised the hat enough to reveal a bald palely speckled head. The hall door closed behind her. He began to tremble with excitement. He reached behind him and drew the coat into his lap. When he got it on, he waited until he had stopped panting, then he gripped the arms of the chair and pulled himself up. His body felt like a great heavy bell whose clapper swung from side to side but made no noise. Once up, he remained standing a moment, swaying until he got his balance. A sensation of terror and defeat swept over him. He would never make it. He would never get there dead or alive. He pushed one foot forward and did not fall and his confidence returned. "The Lord is my shepherd," he muttered, "I shall not want." He began moving toward the sofa where he would have support. He reached it. He was on his way.

By die time he got to the door, she would be down the four flights of steps and out of the building. He got past the sofa and crept along by the wall, keeping his hand on it for support. Nobody was going to bury him here. He was as confident as if die woods of home lay at the bottom of the stairs. He reached the front door of the apartment and opened it and peered into the hall. This was the first time he had looked into it since the actor had knocked him down. It was dank-smelling and empty. The thin piece of linoleum stretched its moldy length to the door of the other apartment, which was closed. "Nigger actor," he said.

The head of die stairs was ten or twelve feet from where he stood and he bent his attention to getting there widiout creeping around die long way with a hand on the wall. He held his arms a little way out from his sides and pushed forward directly. He was halfway diere when all at once his legs disappeared, or felt as if diey had. He looked down, bewildered, for diey were still diere. He fell forward and grasped die banister post widi both hands. Hanging diere, he gazed for what seemed the longest time he had ever looked at anything down die steep unlighted steps; dien he closed his eyes and pitched forward. He landed upside down in die middle of the flight.

He felt presently the tilt of the box as they took it off the train and got it on the baggage wagon. He made no noise yet. The train jarred and slid away. In a moment the baggage wagon was rumbling under him, carrying him back to the station side. He heard footsteps rattling closer and closer to him and he supposed that a crowd was gathering. Wait until they see this, he thought.

"That him," Coleman said, "one of his tricks."

"It's a damm rat in there," Hooten said.

"It's him. Git the crowbar."

In a moment a shaft of greenish light fell on him. He pushed
through it and cried in a weak voice, "Judgement Day! Judgement Day! You

idiots didn't know it was Judgement Day, did you?"

"Coleman?" he murmured.

The Negro bending over him had a large surly mouth and sullen eyes.

"Ain't any coal man, either," he said. This must be the wrong station, Tanner thought. Those fools put me off too soon. Who is this nigger? It ain't even daylight here.

At the Negro's side was another face, a woman's—pale, topped widi a pile of copper-glinting hair and twisted as if she had just stepped in a pile of dung.

"Oh," Tanner said, "it's you."

The actor leaned closer and grasped him by the front of his shirt. "Judgement day," he said in a mocking voice. "Ain't no judgement day, old man. Cept this. Maybe this here judgement day for you."

Tanner tried to catch hold of a banister-spoke to raise himself but his hand grasped air. The two faces, the black one and the pale one, appeared to be wavering. By an effort of will he kept them focused before him while he lifted his hand, as light as a breath, and said in his jauntiest voice, "Hep me up, Preacher. I'm on my way home I"

His daughter found him when she came in from the grocery store. His hat had been pulled down over his face and his head and arms thrust between the spokes of the banister; his feet dangled over the stairwell like those of a man in the stocks. She tugged at him fran tically and then flew for the police. They cut him out with a saw and said he had been dead about an hour.

She buried him in New York City, but after she had done it she could not sleep at night. Night after night she turned and tossed and very definite lines began to appear in her face, so she had him dug up and shipped the body to Corinth. Now she rests well at night and her good looks have mostly returned.

Notes

THE GERANIUM. *Accent,* vol. VI, Summer 1946. The author submitted this story and "The Crop" to *Accent* on February 7, 1946, mailing them from Currier Graduate House, State University of Iowa at Iowa City. "The Geranium" is the opening story (pp. 1-21) in the typescript of her master's thesis (June 1947).

THE BARBER. Written before June 1947. *The Atlantic,* vol. 226, no. 4, October 1970. Published with a note by Robert Fitzgerald that said: "As Miss O'Connor's literary executor .. . I have consented to this publication with a note making clear . . . the earliness of the story and its

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apparent standing in the estimation of the author." Pages 21-39 'n thesis.

WILDCAT. Written before June 1947. *The North American Review,* vol. 255, no. 1, Spring 1970. Published with the permission of Mr. Fitzgerald; pages 40-51 in the thesis.

THE CROP. Written before February 1946. *Mademoiselle,* vol. 72, no. 6, April 1971. From the note by Mr. Fitzgerald: "Although it is obviously far from her best work, *The Crop* would never be mistaken for anyone else's production . . . We enjoy a small caricature of that shady type, the imaginative artist . . . The exacting art, the stringent spirit, and the sheer kick of her mature work are promised here." Pages 52-66 in the diesis.

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THE TURKEY. Written before June 1947. Entitled "The Capture," *Mademoiselle,* vol. 28, November 1948. Later reprinted in *Best Stories from Mademoiselle,* edited by Cyrilly Abels and Margarita G. Smith, New York, 1961. Pages 67-86 in the thesis.

THE TRAIN. Written before June 1947. Entitled "Train," *Sewanee Review,* vol. 56, April 1948. Revised and expanded to become chapter one of *Wise Blood.* The final story, pages 87-102, in the thesis.

THE PEELER. *Partisan Review,* vol. 16, December 1949. Rewritten and revised for *Wise Blood.*

THE HEART OF THE PARK. *Partisan Review,* vol. 16, February 1949. Rewritten and revised for *Wise Blood.*

A STROKE OF GOOD FORTUNE. Entitled "A Woman on the Stairs," *Tomorrow,* vol. 8, August 1949. It was reprinted under the new title in *Shenandoah,* vol. 4, Spring 1953, and appears as the fourth story in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find,* 1955.

ENOCH AND THE GORILLA. *New World Writing,* edited by Arabel Porter, vol. 1, April 1952. Slightly revised for *Wise Blood.*

A GOOD MAN is HARD TO FIND. *Modern Writing I,* edited by William Phillips and Philip Rahv, 1953. Reprinted in *The House of Fiction,* i960, edited by Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate. The opening story in the collection bearing the same title.

A LATE ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENEMY. *Harper's Bazaar,* vol. 87, September 1953. Eighdi story in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find.*

THE LIFE YOU SAVE MAY BE YOUR OWN. *Kenyon Review,* vol. 15, Spring **1953. Reprinted in *Prize Stories 1954: The O. Henry Awards,* edited** by Paul Engle and Hansford Martin. Third story in *A Good Man Is* ***Hard to Find.***

THE RIVER. *Sewanee Review,* vol. 61, Summer 1953. Second story in *A* ***Good Man Is Hard to Find.***

A CIRCLE IN THE FIRE. *Kenyon Review,* vol. 16, Spring 1954. Reprinted **in *Prize Stories 1955: The O. Henry Awards,* edited by Paul Engle and Hansford Martin, and in *The Best American Short Stories of 1955,*** edited by Martha Foley. Seventh story in *A Good Man Is Hard to* ***Find.***

THE DISPLACED PERSON. *Sewanee Review,* vol. 62, October 1954. The final **story in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find.***

A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY GHOST. *Harper's Bazaar,* vol. 88, May 1954. Fifth **story in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find.***

THE ARTIFICIAL NIGGER. *Kenyon Review,* vol. 17, Spring 1955. Reprinted **in *The Best American Short Stories of 1956,* edited by Martha Foley,** and in *Fiction in the Fifties,* edited by Herbert Gold, 1959. Sixth story **in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find.***

GOOD COUNTRY PEOPLE. *Harper's Bazaar,* vol. 89, June 1955. Ninth story **in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find.***

YOU CAN'T BE ANY POORER THAN DEAD. *New World Writing,* vol. 8, October 1955. Revised and rewritten as the opening chapter of *The* ***Violent Bear It Away.***

GREENLEAF. *Kenyon Review,* vol. 18, Summer 1956. Reprinted as the first-prize story in *Prize Stories 1957: The O. Henry Awards,* edited **by Paul Engle and Constance Urdang; in *First-Prize Stories, 1919*** *1957,* edited by Harry Hansen; in *Best American Short Stories of 1957,* **edited by Martha Foley; and in *First-Prize Stories, 19J9-196*j, edited** by Harry Hansen. Second story in *Everything That Rises Must Con verge.*

A VIEW OF THE WOODS. *Partisan Review,* vol. 24, Fall 1957. Reprinted in *Prize Stories J959: The O. Henry Awards,* edited **by Paul Engle and** Constance Urdang, and in *The Best American Short Stories of 1958,* **edited by Martha Foley. Third story in *Everything That Rises Must*** *Converge.*

THE ENDURING CHILL. *Harper's Bazaar,* vol. 91, July 1958. Fourth story in *Everything That Rises Must Converge.*

THE COMFORTS OF HOME. *Kenyon Review,* vol. 22, Fall i960. Fifth story in *Everything That Rises Must Converge.*

EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERCE. ***New World Writing,*** **edited by Theodore SolotarorT, vol. 19, 1961. Reprinted in *The Best American Short Stories of 1962,* edited by Martha Foley and David Burnett; as**
the first-prize story in *Prize Stories 1963: The 0. Henry Awards,*
edited by Richard Poirier; and in *First-Prize Stories, 1919-1963,* edited by Harry Hansen. Opening story in collection bearing the same tide.

THE PARTRIDGE FESTIVAL. *The Critic,* vol. 19, March 1961.

THE LAME SHALL ENTER FIRST. *Sewanee Review,* vol. 70, Summer 1962.
Sixth story in *Everything That Rises Must Converge.*

WHY DO THE HEATHEN RACE? First published in *Esquire,* vol. 60, July 1963. The accompanying editorial note states: "Flannery O'Connor's . . .
third novel is as yet untitled, and she says it may be years before it's finished. This excerpt is from the beginning sections."

REVELATION. *Sewanee Review,* vol. 72, Spring 1964. First-prize story in *Prize Stories 1965: The 0. Henry Awards,* edited by Richard Poirier and William Abraham. Seventh story in *Everything That Rises Must Converge.*

PARKER'S BACK. First published in *Esquire,* vol. 63, April 1965. Eighth story in *Everything That Rises Must Converge.*

JUDGEMENT DAY. See Comments in introduction, p. xvi. The concluding story in *Everything That Rises Must Converge.*

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